

EMPOWERING FEMINIST CLERGY

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Doctor of Ministry

by

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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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Abstract

Empowering Feminist Clergy

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Feminist clergy are vital to the life of the church. They are providing a large part of the picture of the church's reality that has been largely ignored. That part is women's voice and women's experience. Attempting to reconstruct the reality of the church to include women is a tremendous undertaking, requiring strength and perseverance. Feminist clergy, serving as pastors of local congregations, often give up and leave the church rather than attempt to alter thousands of years of male interpreted tradition. These clergy must be empowered to remain in leadership within the church if the church is to become more inclusive and less oppressive of all people, but particularly of women.

The authority of a church entrenched in patriarchal values is suspect. Feminist clergy are attempting to claim the authority and power of their own experience rather than relying upon the church for their authority and power. In acting out of the authority and power of their own experience, feminist clergy challenge the traditional understandings of authority and power as power-over, encourage other people in the church to claim the authority and power of their own experience, and empower themselves.

Such empowerment occurs in the context of relationships, both inside and outside the environment of the local church. The relational context of mutuality is the foundation of personal empowerment. One way for feminist clergy to foster such a

relational context is to allow their self to be more fully present in their role as clergy:
to act out of the self-in-role.

These clergy must engage in a process of self-definition which includes embodiment and intuition. Once feminist clergy feel in their bodies, claim the value of the personal experience of their body through their sensuality or senses, and stay attuned to their intellect, they are in a position to build relationships of mutuality. It is then essential for feminist clergy to continue to claim the power of their experience by speaking out, claiming their identity and therefore, their authenticity.

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Preface

The power to choose, to make choices is valuable. When we have the power to choose consciously with purpose we are empowered to follow through with our choices with some resolve. The power to choose gives us a sense that we are in control of our lives. When facing difficulty amidst our choices we can find power in the knowledge that this was something we chose for ourselves. Let me provide an example.

I consciously chose to become a parent. After observing other parents and having been a child of two parents, I knew that being a parent would not be easy. There would be challenges, sleepless nights and more gray hair. When I chose to be a parent I knew I was not only choosing to share in the delightful discoveries of a two-year-old and the abundant displays of affection; I was also choosing dirty diapers, sleepless nights, a loss of privacy and many other bigger challenges. In the moments of challenge, I remind myself that this was what I chose: this was part of the whole package. This reminder empowered me to be in control of the situation rather than the situation controlling me.

I am a feminist who chooses to serve as a pastor of a local congregation within the patriarchal church. While this choice is my own, it becomes increasingly difficult to participate in the patriarchy of the church. It often feels as though the patriarchy of the church is in control of me rather than the other way around. For this reason, I find myself often disempowered, realizing that my choices within the church are

limited because of my gender and because of my feminist perspective. However, the claim of the Christ story is so deep in my life that I do not want to give up hope for a more inclusive church.

While my hope is for a church inclusive of all people who have been marginalized, I am limiting my discussion of marginalized people to women, particularly white women, when addressing the difficulties feminist clergy face. While I can express some sense of solidarity, especially with women of other races, I cannot claim to adequately express the concerns of others whose experience is not my own. My desire is for feminist clergy to feel empowered enough to remain in the church. The church needs us: we are gifted, usually more than adequate leaders who care deeply about the present and future of the church.

In this project, I frequently use the first person when referring generally to feminist clergy and women. This is somewhat unorthodox though other feminists are writing in the same manner. (See Beverly Harrison, Making The Connections for an example.) The reasoning behind my own decision to write in such a personal manner has to do with being empowered. When we claim who we are, we are claiming the power of our experiences. When I include myself when writing about feminist clergy, I claim the power of my experience as a feminist pastor in the church. This process has surprised me; I had not realized how I had kept from completely integrating a feminist perspective into my own perspective until I began to write. It has now become impossible for me to exclude myself when speaking or writing about feminism. I now own my subjectivity; I recognize it and embrace it instead of

ignoring its impact in my life and in my choices.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The Problem

The problem addressed by this project is the difficulty clergy experience in attempting to maintain feminist styles of leadership within the context of the local parish. The nature of pastoral leadership is changing by virtue of the fact that women are in pastoral leadership. Women's voice and women's experience are more present in the church. Both women and men are choosing to incorporate women's voice and women's experience, a feminist perspective, into the way they preach, teach and interact with parishioners. These clergy must still present the Christian story through the lens of a patriarchal church in order to find some acceptance. However, there is some freedom to express interpretations of scripture and tradition and approaches to leadership that are informed by feminism. Herein lies a dilemma; clergy who desire to express their faith and leadership in ways informed by feminism find that to do so requires enormous energy because almost everyone else in the church is living out of interpretations of scripture and tradition as well as approaches to leadership that are laden with patriarchal images and assumptions.

According to Nelle Morton, "We live out of our images: not out of our concepts or ideas."¹ Perhaps that is why it has been so difficult to make changes

¹ Nelle Morton, The Journey is Home (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 31.

within the church regarding the role of women. The church's images, which become the images of those who are in the church, are for the most part misogynist. The images of the church, born out of men's experience and men's voice, claim a false universality. For centuries women in the church have had to bridge the gender gap by identifying with a male God, and following the instruction of male interpreted scripture and tradition. Women's experience has been an invalid source of critique upon the Christian story. Is it possible to change attitudes and behaviors of almost two millennia?

Some clergy, particularly women clergy have answered that question by leaving the church. They have found that change is not possible and that there is not enough room in the symbol world of the church for the inclusion of the feminine. There is too much to overcome and reinterpret, leaving these clergy worn out and hopeless.

Some clergy maintain that the church must change in this area in order to be God's reconciling body of Christ in the world. Yet the question is still raised, if the interpretations of almost two thousand years have worked this long, why bother to make any changes or revisions? To begin with, changes and revisions have been made throughout the history of the church, the Reformation being one major example of this. Therefore, changes and revisions are not foreign to the church. Also, if the church continues to live out of its patriarchal images it will continue to deny the full humanity of over half of its constituency: women.

Men have constructed the reality of the church out of their experience. Such a

construction is incomplete and sexist. "A sexist structure of reality is a theological issue . . . any theology developed by one sex, out of the experience of one sex, and taught predominately by one sex, cannot possibly be lived out as if it were whole theology."² The theology created by men in the Christian church is incomplete, informed by power-over images, language and practice.

The church continues to be entrenched in power-over images, language and practice. Power-over is "power as dominion, control, or mastery . . . evoking the image of the highly individuated self-actualizer."³ The church's image of God is based upon this understanding of power. God is a highly individuated self-actualizer not needing assistance from anyone. God is in control of the universe, willing events according to his plan. Such images of God are readily available in Christian hymnody, the body of literature whose images probably most influence the faith development of Christians. Lord, king and father are the primary metaphors used to describe God, all of which represent a male in a position of power over other people. While such imagery of God may be appropriate in a particular context, it can become inappropriate and oppressive if not tempered by other images of God born out of the experience of those whose voices have been silenced.

Women in the church have been "the other" throughout the history of Christianity. The absence of women's voice in the creation of images and theology

² Ibid., 67.

³ Janet Surrey, Relationship and Empowerment, Work in Progress, no. 30 (Wellesley: Wellesley College, Stone Center, 1987), 2.

has resulted in violence to women and what might be called the invisible woman.⁴

Because women's voice and experience have been left out of the construction of religious and secular realities, women have had to bridge what can be called a gender gap. In order to find a place in the patriarchal reality, women abandon the truth of their own experience, take on the assigned female roles of patriarchy or become like men in order to do what men do. Also women's experience has been viewed as deviant.⁵ If the church is going to live out of a whole theology, if the church desires to be the reconciling body of Christ to all peoples then the experience of women must be incorporated into the Christian story, even at the risk of having to re-write or relinquish parts of that story. If the church is going to move in the direction of being a redemptive community, there must be dialogue between people of differing perspectives, even at the risk of conflict.

Clergy who speak out of different assumptions regarding the Christian story or who question or critique orthodox views become suspect. Such questioning and critiquing of the tradition rocks the boat and very few people see the benefit of sailing some rough seas. The clergy who question and critique are threatening an entrenched system that needs to cling to its symbol life in order not to change. Their validity as leaders is questioned, ridiculed or worse yet, trivialized as they are perceived to be

⁴ See Matilda Joslyn Gage, Woman, Church and State (1893; reprint, Watertown, Mass.: Persephone Press, 1980) for a discussion of violence done to women accused of witchcraft and a discussion of abuse of wives justified by church teachings.

⁵ Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 6.

threatening to undermine the traditions of the church.

How do clergy, who intentionally choose a feminist approach to leadership, maintain their own spiritual, mental and emotional well-being in this situation? How does one sustain this approach and still keep from being co-opted into the oppressive system in order to have power and authority as leaders?

Feminist Leadership

Feminists recognize that there is no one particular norm for the expression of one's power and authority. The expression of power and authority must be contextual. This is not to say that there is no ethical norm for the expression of power and authority. According to Lynn Rhodes in her book Co-Creating: A Feminist Vision Of Ministry,

Justice is the ethical norm. . . . the basic task is to seek understanding of the causes of injustice in every situation in order to resist oppression and foster liberation.⁶

What feminists question is the assumption that the expressions of power and authority along patriarchal lines is the norm. Feminists recognize that individuals act out of their own class and race assumptions. An individual's perspective is informed by her/his experience as Hispanic, African-American, Korean, etc., as well as their economic standing. The experiences of race and class effect one's experience of power and authority. Therefore, no one group of individuals can claim that its expression of power and authority is the norm upon which all others are based. Yet

⁶ Lynn Rhodes, Co-Creating: A Feminist Vision of Ministry (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 11-12.

the assumed models of leadership have indeed been based upon one particular group who has held power over much of the rest of the world for some time: white men. Rather than fall into the trap of blaming any particular group for the misuse of a particular model of power and authority it is more constructive and reconciling to simply question the assumption of any norm as the basis upon which everyone's performance is judged.

In Co-Creating, Rhodes explores the many ways women are living out their feminist orientation as minister in the local church. It is clear that there is no one model of feminist ministry but that these women have acted out of a consciousness, informed by feminism, within their own context. Rhodes shares with the reader feminist insights on such issues as authority, justice and vocation, providing a picture for how women in ministry are developing and sharing a vision of Christianity informed by feminism and women's experience.

Rhodes notes in the preface how easy it is to be co-opted into the system which for feminists is the patriarchal structures and beliefs of the church. She does not specifically address how one keeps from being co-opted, that is, how one maintains a feminist vision in word and deed, although there are some indications of what might be ingredients for establishing a feminist approach. Rhodes' work is descriptive of a feminist vision of ministry. What is needed now is a way to maintain that vision and activity without being co-opted into or by the patriarchal structures and beliefs of the church.

Julian Rappaport's work on empowerment helps demonstrate that categories of

authority require more mutuality and accountability. His work is in the area of social policy and is easily translated into the social world of the institution of church. His understanding of empowerment is nonhierarchical, based on what seems to be a theory of mutuality. This coincides with feminist understandings of leadership; the leader helps create an environment in which people can discover for themselves how best to gain control over their lives as well as give direction to their own lives.

The work of empowerment, according to Julian Rappaport, "should be to enhance the possibilities for people to control their own lives."⁷ It is contextual, definable within the parameters of particular experience. Janet Surrey's definition of empowerment, based on the work of Rappaport, points a way toward an understanding and use of the concept within this project. While her definition is based on a psychological model, it can inform a spiritual and theological model of empowerment. It is "the motivation, freedom, and capacity to act purposefully, with the mobilization of the energies, resources, strengths, or powers of each person through a mutual, relational process."⁸

Thesis

A process of empowerment is helpful in maintaining feminist approaches to ministry among pastors serving in the local church. Such empowerment occurs in the context of relationships, both inside and outside the environment of the local church.

⁷ Jean Rappaport, "In Praise of Paradox: A Social Policy of Empowerment Over Prevention," Redefining Social Problems, eds. Edward Seidman and Julian Rappaport (New York: Plenum Press, 1986), 154.

⁸ Surrey, 2.

The relational context of mutuality is the foundation of personal empowerment. One way to foster such relationships is for feminist clergy to allow themselves to be more fully present in their role as clergy: to act out of self-in-role.

Power is one of the issues at the core of the struggle to develop and maintain a feminist approach to ministry. Rhodes writes, "Addressing the power arrangements in their [women clergy's] communities is a prerequisite . . . for understanding their own authority."⁹ As women bring different understandings of power with them into their role as clergy "they are careful not to assume a universal authority."¹⁰ Authority is personal, grounded in one's own experience and informed by the experience of others. Authority is the confidence one has to act out of a sense of being empowered in and through a context of mutual relationship.¹¹ Empowerment thus can result in providing a sense of authority to individuals and to communities, a sense of validity for their beliefs.

Empowerment is relational; "personal empowerment and the relational context . . . must always be considered simultaneously."¹² For this reason, it is essential for feminist clergy, serving as local church pastors, to feel comfortable with building relationships of mutual support both within the local church and beyond the local church. Empowerment is supposed to help people feel more in control of their lives

⁹ Rhodes, 29.

¹⁰ Ibid., 49.

¹¹ Ibid., 46.

¹² Surrey, 2.

and this cannot be done outside of the context of relationships. People effect one another, so feminist clergy must learn how to be effected positively by others and to not be overly effected by those who would sabotage feminist leadership because they disagree with a feminist perspective. This project relies primarily on library research. Case studies and personal reflection are used for the purpose of illustration.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 2 examines the ways in which feminist clergy and lay people are already attempting to incorporate woman's voice and experience into the theology of the church. This chapter is descriptive of what is currently being done in the area of feminist interpretation of scripture and tradition.

Chapter 3 explores problems pastors face when they do not operate out of lines of authority based on hierarchical structures or time honored interpretations of scripture and tradition. By virtue of being ordained by the church, a pastor is granted authority to lead within the institutional church. When that pastor operates out of different images than the expected and accepted images, problems can arise. The pastor's ability to act is seriously compromised if parishioners question or disagree with what the pastor chooses to preach and teach and how the pastor chooses to lead. The temptation the pastor faces is the temptation to avoid conflict. In order to avoid conflict, the pastor allows him/herself to be pulled by the center of the community's culture, rather than calling the community toward the edge and forward change.

Chapter 4 proposes a response to the conflict feminist clergy face. Feminist clergy who desire to stay in the church do so usually because they want/need the

church to address the sins of patriarchy. In spite of the oppression which patriarchy in the church creates and supports, feminist clergy sense hope in the stories of faith told in and by the church, particularly the stories of Jesus. It is a vision of the church as redemptive community that keeps many of us committed to the task of opening the bureaucracy of the church. One of the ways we do this is through claiming our own personal authority, rather than depending upon the traditional authority (granted from the bureaucracy) of the church. We are further empowered through the building of relationships of mutuality with people in the local congregations where we work and beyond the local congregation in intentional relationships.

Chapter 5 is a vision of one possible way of making empowerment more concrete through its application in one's spirituality. Feminist clergy must practice being empowered if we are going to feel or get empowered. The approach that can be made toward empowerment is suggestive of a spiritual process that seeks to bring together the elements of empowerment. Self-definition is proposed as the first step in this process. Self-definition involves both embodiment and intellect; we must know our bodies and minds together to be whole people. The purpose of self-definition is to empower the self to be highly differentiated. A highly differentiated self is necessary to engage in relationships of mutuality. The second step is building those relationships of mutuality which requires of feminist clergy deep listening, what might also be called, hearing into speech. Speaking out is the third step in which feminist clergy claim the authority of our experience through the articulation of feminist values and perspectives.

CHAPTER 2

Reconstructing Reality

The methodology of feminism brings into focus the experience of women and women's interpretation of scripture and tradition. Those clergy who choose to be informed by feminism are in essence claiming there is authority in women's experience and women's perspective.¹ Such an approach to ministry informs pastoral leadership in two ways: (1) how clergy interpret scripture and tradition through preaching and teaching, and (2) how clergy interact as a leader with laity within a local congregation.

Interpretation of Scripture and Tradition

Clergy choosing to integrate women's experience into their preaching and teaching run into difficulty because the use of women's experience "has been almost entirely shut out of theological reflection in the past."² Fortunately, in more recent years, this reflection has been occurring, providing new information about women's

¹ While this project is focusing on women's experience, women are not the only people whose full humanity has been denied in the church. There is "no final synthesis that encompasses all human experience, criticizes what is sexist, and appropriates what is usable in all historical traditions." Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism And God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 20.

² Ibid., 13.

experience in the world and in the church notably to clergy, but also to the church itself. We must keep in mind, however, that while feminism in the church is opening some doors to new images and perspectives, the church is still in the habit of living out of its patriarchal images and perspectives.

"The history of early Christianity is written from the perspective of the historical winners."³ Women were among the losers and continued to be throughout the history of the church. In Woman, Church and State, Matilda Joslyn Gage demonstrated the validity of this statement in one of the first critical looks at what might be called the male collaboration against the female sex. Written almost 100 years ago, this book outlines how the church, armed with male only images, collaborated with the state in the subjugation of women.⁴

One of the most visible areas of women's subjugation or relegation to the back seat has been the denial of ordination to the ministry of the clergy. Recently, the Church of England has decided to ordain women. Many Anglican church members have been overjoyed and others have been quite unhappy about the whole matter. Opponents point to scripture, contending "that their Bible does not sanction women priests."⁵ There is also concern about future ecumenical dialogue with the Roman

³ Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 83.

⁴ "When the femininity of the divine is once again acknowledged, the Lost Name will be discovered and the holiness (wholeness) of divinity will be manifested." Gage, 32.

⁵ William Tuohy, "Women May Be Priests, Church of England Says," Los Angeles Times, 12 Nov 1992: A12.

Catholic church over the issue. "The Roman Catholic Church issued a statement declaring that (the) decision represents new and grave obstacles to its reconciliation with the Anglican churches."⁶ One Anglican official noted "the prospect of female priests could interrupt the ecumenical process and postpone it for a long time."⁷ The hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church is being forced to deal with this issue from its own people and yet continues to hold fast to the belief that both the Bible and tradition do not sanction women priests: Christ had only male disciples.

The Church of England and the Roman Catholic church are not the only ecclesial bodies struggling with the ordination of women in one way or another. The tradition of the twelve male disciples and assumed male supremacy as interpreted in Paul's letters and the so-called Pastoral Epistles are at the heart of the argument against women's ordination in fundamentalist and evangelical circles and was one of the dividing points in the recent split among Southern Baptists. But what of Protestant churches that do ordain women? Does the ordination of women free churches from their patriarchal bias?

Generally speaking, no, it does not. It is a step toward a more holistic leadership, but there is an expectation that women as clergy will further the traditions of the church as their male counterparts do. When churches ordain women they do not expect women to be critical and demand change. Many women do not; it is more comfortable and politically rewarding to stick with the party line. So while some

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

churches do indeed ordain women, it is with the expectation that they will uphold the current values of the church community.

Such churches still maintain a hierarchy of relationships founded in acknowledged and unacknowledged patriarchal assumptions. This is reflected in the worship life of most American Protestant churches: the sacraments can only be celebrated under the supervision of the clergy and administered by the clergy. There continues to be a ladder of relationships in the division of labor among congregations, districts, regions or conferences and national boards. A clergy's power is perceived to be directly related to the size of the church s/he serves or where s/he is situated in the hierarchy of positions in the bureaucracy. While words like mutuality and partnership are heard more frequently, they are often used to gloss over the inequities that exist. The church is still much more comfortable with a power-over approach in its operation and its worship.

One of the ways feminist leadership has continued to respond to the situation has been through the interpretation of scripture and tradition. About one hundred years ago, feminists recognized the need for women to be involved in the interpretive process. The Woman's Bible first appeared in 1895 as an avenue of expression for women scholars in order to demonstrate "the male bias that had distorted the interpretation of the Bible and the misogyny of the text itself".⁸ Elizabeth Cady Stanton initiated the project with "two critical insights for a feminist theological

⁸ Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds., introduction to The Women's Bible Commentary (London: SPCK, 1992), xiv.

hermeneutics [in mind]: "(1) the Bible is not a neutral book, but a political weapon against women's struggle for liberation. (2) This is so because the Bible bears the imprint of men who never saw or talked with God."⁹

Apart from some of the obvious political implications, the Bible's having been used as a means of the subjugation of women and its having had authority for women believers, Stanton also recognized the interdependent nature of all reforms.

One cannot reform the law and other cultural institutions without also reforming biblical religion which claims the Bible as Holy Scripture. . . . a critical feminist interpretation is a necessary political endeavor. . . . If feminists think they can neglect the revision of the Bible because there are more pressing political issues, then they do not recognize the political impact of Scripture upon the churches and society, and also upon the lives of women.¹⁰

Some of the women of the suffrage movement at the turn of the twentieth century recognized the power of the language and imagery of the patriarchal church. If the language, the images and the male creation and interpretation of these cornerstones were not addressed in a critical manner, the effect of their work to liberate women from the sub-human class they inhabited would only be superficial. The language and imagery would continue to define women in subjugated terms.

The most recent attempt at the application of a critical feminist interpretation of the Bible, The Women's Bible Commentary, recognizes this far-reaching power of the scriptures to both subjugate and liberate. The editors note that "the Bible . . . has shaped and continues to shape human lives, communities, and cultures in the West. [It

⁹ Fiorenza, 7.

¹⁰ See Fiorenza, 11.

is] often referred to in other literature, and the value of these texts . . . have shaped both philosophies and legal systems."¹¹

Many feminists have chosen to address the power the Bible has by dismissing it. For them, there is no redeemable feature within the texts; the Bible is wholly misogynist, burdened with the assumptions of centuries of patriarchy. Others recognize that if the absence of women's voices in the texts and the misogyny of the texts are not addressed, the power of the texts to subjugate women will never diminish.

The significance of the absence of women in the scripture as well as their presence - - usually one-dimensional - - is just now gaining limited acceptance in the realm of scholarship. It isn't that feminists think their perspective is the only perspective; feminists know that the male perspective is not the only perspective or the norm for everyone and want the establishment to recognize that fact. Some of the more liberal church officials and clergy are also recognizing the legitimacy of critical feminist interpretations, but most are either openly hostile or worse yet pay only lip service.¹²

¹¹ Sharon H. Ringe, "When Women Interpret the Bible," The Women's Bible Commentary, eds. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (London: SPCK, 1992), 2-3. The Women's Bible Commentary "is the first comprehensive attempt to gather some of the fruits of feminist biblical scholarship on each book of the Bible in order to share it with the larger community of women who read the Bible," Newsom and Ringe, introduction, xv.

¹² "I was surprised to find how many women (in the Bible) there were whose stories were totally new to me, whose roles had never been highlighted in my church school materials, and whose acts of faith had never been the subject of any sermons I had heard." Kathleen Farmer, "Retelling the Story: Reinterpreting Biblical Tradition

Theology, "the stepping stone between revelation and application,"¹³ has been defined primarily by men in support of male supremacy. Clergy, both male and female, who knowingly continue this practice of male-only theology merely pander to the culture of the church and society. They only help to maintain the defensive posture of the church and its patriarchal theology instead of helping the church find a responsive posture that addresses its sins of commission and omission toward women.

Since the days of the Social Gospel, the Church has been more apt to retell the story in light of those who have been left out, noting the prophetic nature of Jesus' message and ministry. Even today, feminists rely on the prophetic tradition as a sounding board for the interpretation of scripture and even tradition.¹⁴ But those choosing to employ feminism in the activity of biblical investigation and interpretation must above all approach the text with what has come to be known as a hermeneutic of suspicion.

A hermeneutic of suspicion recognizes that the Bible is androcentric and brings questions to the text that seek to uncover the voices from which we do not hear, namely women. Such a hermeneutic questions the reporting of voices rarely heard

as a Woman," Changing Contexts of Our Faith, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 53.

¹³ Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Nancy A. Hardesty, All We're Meant to Be: Biblical Feminism for Today (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 25.

¹⁴ "Feminism appropriates the prophetic principles in ways the biblical writers for the most part do not appropriate them, namely to criticize this unexamined framework. Feminist theology that draws on Biblical principles is possible only if the prophetic principles . . . imply a reflection of every elevation of one social group against others as image and agent of God." Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 23.

from, recognizing these reports are filtered through androcentric assumptions. For instance, feminists bring questions to particular translations of the text itself. In the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, the editors decided that all pronouns referring to God would be masculine, claiming this was grammatically correct. Like Spanish or French, all Greek and Hebrew nouns "have grammatical gender."¹⁵ But when translating from Spanish to English, for example, one does not say "the table, she"; one says "the table, it." Ringe comments:

Where pronouns convey biological and not merely grammatical gender, the pronoun that refers to "table" would be translated with the neuter *it*. The same freedom prevails in rendering pronouns from Greek and Hebrew. Thus, the decision about which pronoun to use for God is one that cannot be made on grammatical ground. It is a theological decision, and one whose resolution affects the way one views God.¹⁶

Clearly, feminists must be suspicious, questioning the androcentric assumptions of the text and of its interpretation in order to bring women's voice and experience into dialogue with the scriptures. Many fine feminist scholars have already employed this suspicion in a variety of critical approaches to feminist hermeneutics - - most notably - Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Letty M. Russell. It is important however, to also understand how feminist clergy are actually living out a feminist hermeneutic in pulpits and in church classrooms.

First of all, feminist clergy are reshaping tradition in their incorporation of a variety of images and metaphors for God. God-language is traditionally male even

¹⁵ Ringe, 8.

¹⁶ Ibid.

though there is even scriptural evidence for the use of a variety of images for God, including so-called inanimate objects. In remembering these other metaphors and creating some new ones, feminist clergy open up new understandings of who God is and how God interacts with creation.

Many of the church's images of God are informed by warfare: warrior, king, triumphant God. These are images that are taken from a primarily male realm. Women's experience of warfare has historically been much different from men's. Women's experience causes us to pick out different scriptural images that have been subsumed in these larger-than-life images. In addition, Christine Smith in Weaving the Sermon: Preaching in a Feminist Perspective writes

[that women] are now beginning to claim our own authority in the naming of God from our own distinctive female lives. The source of our God images and our God language shifts from the biblical heritage as primary, to our own lives' being another center of naming and theologizing.¹⁷

The authority of the biblical heritage comes under the scrutiny of a hermeneutic of suspicion. This is also true of the heritage of biblical interpretation. When approaching and researching a text, feminist clergy are careful to question the assumptions behind biblical scholarship. The need for a feminist interpretation of the Bible is great and The Women's Bible Commentary is one of the most recent and comprehensive contributions. Smith discusses the need for continued feminist interpretation of the Bible:

¹⁷ Christine M. Smith, Weaving the Sermon: Preaching in a Feminist Perspective (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 75-76.

The emergence of a feminist biblical hermeneutic is not only a necessary corrective, but is absolutely essential if inclusive preachers are to continue to give the scriptures any relevant authority in their own lives and in the life of their preaching.¹⁸

In response to a sermon I preached and the benediction that followed, a parishioner said, "Everything was great until the end." The sermon was based on the text which describes God as a mother hen gathering her brood. I used feminine pronouns for God, at the end of the sermon and the end of the service; the benediction made reference to this image. I informed the parishioner that this was scriptural. He accepted this, although somewhat reluctantly. But what of those statements feminist clergy make that are not so easily justified? What of those statements that fly in the face of what the church and most Christians hold as authoritative?

In light of the opposition that feminist clergy encounter, it is essential for us, especially women, to remember that women are not historical objects, but historical subjects. For Mary Daly, a leading feminist, this means women must step out of the patriarchal tower and create a sacred circle of space that is separate.¹⁹ The problem with this however is that "it is not able to restore history to women."²⁰ Unless women participate in the authorship of reality, we will continue to be objects of the story of mankind rather than subject of the story of humankind.

Rosemary Radford Ruether has provided a major contribution toward this in Women-Church: Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities. Women-

¹⁸ Smith, 92.

¹⁹ Fiorenza, 26.

²⁰ Ibid.

Church is a concept and practice that allows feminists to "reach behind traditional patriarchal religion as represented by the New Testament and the Hebrew Scriptures."²¹ It does not claim to establish or re-establish a true faith. Women-church seeks to provide an arena for feminist religious expression within a community, thus giving voice to women's experience in the context of worship. Because most church members are opposed to the new symbols and rituals that feminists bring to the worship life of the church, women-church provides a safe place for the exploration of spirituality from a feminist perspective. Such spiritual exploration is essential for the well-being of feminist clergy. In Chapter 5 this is demonstrated more precisely in a discussion of how relationships of mutuality can be built.

Incorporating women's experience and voice into the worship life of the church is one way feminist clergy are attempting to restore history to women. Hymns are one part of worship life these clergy address. Whenever possible, hymns that use inclusive language are sung as well as hymns that use a range of metaphorical language. For this reason, contemporary hymns that use inclusive language and communicate a theology of power-with rather than power-over are sought out by feminist clergy.

One example is a hymn by Brian Wren, "Bring Many Names" (see Appendix A). The language of this hymn created much controversy among those who were in

²¹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, Women-Church: Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985).

charge of putting together the most recent Methodist hymnal. The verse that created the most difficulty was the one which referred to God as Mother God. Even the imagery which indicated God was not immovable and unchangeable but is moved by human experience with an ability to change was not questioned. The feminine image of the divine was just more than some could bear.

Even though some contemporary hymn writers are providing other than patriarchal images of God, clergy do not have to rely solely on the work of contemporary hymn writers. Traditional hymns that assume an androcentric perspective are redeemable. Some feminist clergy, recognizing the value of familiar tunes and familiar words, simply rewrite portions of the text of hymns that are in the public domain. Most God language is easily altered, for example, substituting God for he. Sometimes, however, a text must be altered more severely, requiring some effort on the part of the clergy doing the work. For this reason, it is often easier to let the patriarchal language and power-over theology stand. But clergy who make the effort are rewarded; there is personal satisfaction in having accomplished such a feat and since hymnody is one of the most effective shapers of our theology if not the most effective, it is essential that feminist clergy have input into hymnody.

When feminist clergy take a proactive posture toward hymnody, we are effecting change both in a subliminal and a forthright manner. Ruth Duck and Michael G. Bausch, in Everflowing Streams²² have given to clergy not only some

²² Ruth C. Duck and Michael G. Bausch, eds., Everflowing Streams: Songs for Worship (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1981).

traditional and contemporary hymns with inclusive language, but has provided a precedent and model for this activity.

Another way in which feminist clergy incorporate women's experience and voice into the worship life of the church is through preaching. In approaching the biblical text, feminist clergy bring an added range of questions and concerns. When researching a text, feminist clergy are quick to observe and question the androcentric assumptions of biblical scholarship. Perhaps a frustrating component of this process is that most clergy lack the finer tools of biblical investigation, i.e., a working knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, and so rely on the scholarship of others for their exegesis. This does not mean, however, that clergy are limited to the work of so-called experts. Feminist clergy recognize this and are willing to enter into a dialogical relationship with both text and scholarship.

In listening for women's voice in the text and trying to discern women's experience, feminist clergy must rely on a historical and sociological understanding of the text as well as our own experience. It is in recognizing the value and authority of our own experience that feminist clergy are able to make connections between the biblical text and the lives of the people in the pew. A clergywoman stated, "First of all, I try to see if it makes sense to my belief structure. I use what fits with what I believe. I don't ever say what I don't believe."²³ Sometimes clergy take the opportunity to address feminist concerns in the form of a sermon told by the character of the woman in the text, the telling of her perspective. (See Appendix B for an

²³ Jane Wiatt, telephone interview with author, 30 Nov. 1992.

example.) Another clergywoman stated, "I don't consciously do that [work from a feminist perspective] unless it's a text that deals with a woman or with women. I take opportunities like that to break stereotypes."²⁴

Many feminist clergy see their task as uncovering what's been hidden in the text by androcentric assumptions. "I look for what people haven't heard," was one clergy woman's comment.²⁵ Leading a youth group meeting on sexism, a clergywomen used stories of Jesus' interacting with women, most of which are left out of the lectionary - - stories these youth had never heard.²⁶

A clergy man said he "looks for relationships - - of characters, of God to what's going on, to creation."²⁷ Because of the liberating nature of feminist theology, clergy who are informed by feminism tend to look at the biblical text from the perspective of who is oppressed and who receives liberation. "I look for what's liberation for women," said a clergywoman. "The flip side," she continued, "is that it's often convicting for men."²⁸

For feminist clergy to remember and act out the fact that women are historical subjects is to claim authority in their own worldview, even though it may be in opposition to the accepted norm. It is the courage to be. How else can feminist

²⁴ Louise Sloan Goben, telephone interview with author, 30 Nov. 1992.

²⁵ Wiatt.

²⁶ Natalie Houghtby, telephone interview with author, 30 Nov. 1992.

²⁷ Galen Goben, telephone interview with author, 30 Nov. 1992.

²⁸ Hillary Chrisley, telephone interview with author, 30 Nov. 1992.

clergy keep from being co-opted by the patriarchal church, except by "articulating [our] values and incorporating them into the structures of [our] communities."²⁹

Feminist clergy must understand their own perspective and be clear with others about who they are and how they view the world. This process of self-exploration and self-definition is not narcissistic but serves to make the feminist clergy's views clearer to others and to open up the experience of others to feminist clergy. Elie Wiesel once wrote "the more I am able to write out of my own Jewishness, the more universally I am able to communicate."³⁰

The more clearly we define ourselves, the more clearly others are able to see us and interact with us. The more clearly we define ourselves, the easier it is for us to see where we connect and do not connect with others. This makes the building of bridges a viable option. Thus, the interpretation of scripture and tradition can become a joint activity of preacher and community.

The feminist preacher does not preach at or to, but with. Nelle Morton has named this as "hearing to speech."³¹ In The Journey is Home, this idea is articulated in her statement about women who preach.

If the style of a woman's preaching was not to deliver (to proclaim) the Word but to place her ear close to the pulse of the people, then a new kind of pentecost would be possible. Each tongue would be loosened and each would be speaking her/his own word and that word would be herself/himself. . . . If the Word became the people's word,

²⁹ Rhodes, 13.

³⁰ Quoted in Isabel Carter Heyward, The Redemption of God (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1982), 74.

³¹ Morton, 202.

then the people, and not the preacher (or, and the preacher), would become the minister.³²

One clergywoman's observation of her own preaching echoes this idea. "Even when I'm very clear about my own stand, my function in the pulpit is not as authority figure but as one willing to enter into the struggle for common vision."³³

Nelle Morton's vision of preaching has implications for the type of leadership feminist women and men can bring to the church. How feminist clergy lead and interact with their communities is just as important as what they say to their communities. Feminists recognize that the medium is also a part of the message.

Clergy Leadership

Literature about ministerial leadership demonstrates an understanding that a minister's authority and status are directly related to the scripture and traditions of the church. The traditional model has been that of servant. The pastor is a servant called by God to serve among the people of God as teacher, preacher and in the contemporary context, counselor and administrator. The model of servant raises difficulties that can make situations in which mutuality is not possible among clergy and laity.

Feminists want to affirm mutuality as a quality of effective leadership. Mutuality makes possible the activity of friendship which many feminists claim to be a viable approach to Christian service and relationship. There are also problems with

³² Ibid., 41.

³³ Rhodes, 48.

the friendship model and the activity of mutuality for clergy. The role of pastor can be abused by clergy who are not aware of or refuse to acknowledge the power and authority the role of pastor carries for many people. Mutuality and friendship can be abused in ways that are destructive to both clergy and laity.

Servant Model

The model of servant has long been used to illustrate the role of the pastor. Robert Dale calls it a leadership stance which "provides a foundation, a basic position and reason for exercising leadership."³⁴ Dale explores the biblical background for this leadership stance of servanthood, and, from the Gospel of Mark, demonstrates how Christian leaders are: servants of people, servants of God, servants with a mission, and how they serve prophetically, and are empowered by a God who suffered and rose again.³⁵ Within these categories is contained the whole of the Christian story.

Servanthood is also something laity and clergy alike expect from pastors. In a survey by the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, over 2,000 laity and clergy were asked to identify their expectations in ministry. "The most significant characteristic . . . that people across denominational lines are seeking in their young clergy is service without regard for personal acclaim."³⁶

³⁴ Robert D. Dale, Pastoral Leadership (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 34. Dale differentiates leadership style as a leader's manner of expressing initiative - - a distinctive fashion of leading.

³⁵ Ibid, 30-32.

³⁶ Cited in Carnegie Samuel Calian, Today's Pastor in Tomorrow's World (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 16.

There are problems with a servant model however. If indeed clergy are granted traditional authority as understood within the framework of the model described by sociologist Max Weber, it is an authority that is supposed to grant power to rule, govern and/or lead. The implication, as noted earlier, is that those imbued with authority have power over the group they are leading. If clergy are supposed to be servants, whom do they serve: the congregations in which they work, God, or both? Can the leader be the servant and still be an effective leader? Is there another interpretation of servanthood that is empowering or another model, based on scripture, that might be more effective? The need is to find the creative tension between the authority figure who has power over and the servant who has no authority or power.

Tradition holds that Jesus, while being the teacher and the master of his disciples, made himself a servant not only to God but to his followers. This was most clearly illustrated when Jesus washed the disciple's feet.³⁷ This model of servanthood is still expected of clergy today, however there is a major difference that effects the leadership capability of the clergy. Jesus started out as a recognized leader by his followers. It wasn't until after he became their leader and teacher that he turned the tables and became their servant. Clergy today are expected to be servants based on this understanding of Jesus' ministry without the luxury of authority that was accorded to Jesus. This assumption of the role of the leader misses an exegetical point. Jesus made himself a servant in the eyes of those who saw him as leader; the power of choice was his. The role was not imposed upon him by his followers. Jesus turned

³⁷ See John 13:5, NRSV.

turned the expectations of the people upside down in an effort to express the nature of the reign of God. The expectations of people in the church today are by and large that the clergy are servants - - of God and the church. Finding the creative tension between power over and power under must involve recreating those expectations.

Ronald Osborn offers a more mutual picture of the servanthood model in his book on Christian ministry. In the book In Christ's Place, Osborn demonstrates that all Christians are servants; he calls Christians a servant-people. Ministry is not something done by an appointed few within the walls of a sanctuary. Ministry is something in which the whole people of God in Christ endeavor to serve. Jesus "invites us to servanthood . . . to providing in history the means by which he ministers to mankind [sic]."³⁸ If all Christians claim the identity of servant then clergy are "ministers among the servant people."³⁹

Osborn is strongly opposed to sacerdotalism, what he calls a priestcraft, stating,

it denies the gospel of God's gracious coming to every man [sic] in Christ Jesus the servant, distorts the worship of the church by making it the work of the professional priests rather than of the grateful people as a whole, thwarts the mission of servant hood by the implication God calls only the clergy to his [sic] service and corrupts the hierarchy itself by placing it in a position to exploit the credulity and the anguish of men [sic].⁴⁰

Coming from a tradition that accepts the ministry of the laity on par with that of the

³⁸ Ronald Osborn, In Christ's Place (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1967), 47.

³⁹ Ibid., 60.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 75.

clergy, Osborn's view of servanthood is steeped in mutuality. The servanthood of Jesus is the servanthood of all Christians, lay and clergy alike. It is something we share because of our common faith in God's activity in Christ. Most literature on clergy leadership does not address this sense of mutuality and one can only guess that it is simply not assumed.

Mutuality

A feminist approach to ministry affirms the notion and action of mutuality. While the servanthood model outlined by Osborn is useful and appropriate, feminists offer other ways of exploring mutuality.

Lynn Rhodes explores the concept of clergy as co-creators in Co-Creating: A Feminist Vision of Ministry. Co-creators are those willing to develop their own authority and others' through work that is empowering and relational.⁴¹ Rhodes has limited her investigation to women but her observations and insights apply to women and men who choose a feminist approach to ministry. As was noted in the previous section on biblical interpretation, it is essential for feminist clergy to define themselves clearly. Rhodes states that "the starting point is honoring the validity of one's own experience . . . [being] articulate about valuing [one's] own religious experience."⁴² This is the first step of empowerment for feminist clergy. The next is hearing to speech the religious experience of the members of the communities in which they serve. Rhodes observes:

⁴¹ Rhodes, 27.

⁴² Ibid., 31.

These women find that their own authority as clergy comes when they claim the power of their own experience and expect others to claim the same power. Then, in mutual exchange, a faith relationship can develop. That relationship . . . forms the basis of their authority for ministry.⁴³

Many feminists have named that relationship as friendship. They cite the 15th chapter of the gospel of John as the basis for this naming: "I do not call you servants, for the servant doesn't know what the Lord is doing. From now on I will call you friends."⁴⁴ It is important to define what is meant by friendship. Friendship is first of all relational. The relational aspect of friendship is often taken for granted but is a vital expression of friendship. The relation of God and Jesus is mostly described as a hierarchical relation from which the rest of us take our cue.

God is the Father of Jesus and Jesus obeys his Father, even to the point of death. Jesus' life serves the purposes of his father. Christians often refer to themselves as the children of God. This indicates a perpetual childhood: the children of God are always dependent upon God and God must take care of God's children. Normally, children grow to be less dependent upon their parents and in some cases enjoy relationships of friendship. The model of perpetual childhood is encouraged by the single metaphor of Father for God.⁴⁵ Heyward challenges this assumption.

⁴³ Ibid., 36.

⁴⁴ John 15:15, NRSV.

⁴⁵ See Sallie McFague, Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987, for an examination of how human metaphors for God effect the way humanity acts and interacts. McFague demonstrates a correlation between metaphors for God and the behavior of those who invest their imagination in those metaphors.

In Jesus' relation to God, Jesus grows with God in love. It is a relation in which each gives and receives and stands out as distinct from the other. . . . Jesus is God's child who grows in relation to God and becomes God's friend in a voluntary and mutual relation. God is parent in that God is resource for Jesus' growth in power. But it may be equally appropriate . . . to image God as Jesus' child, whose growth in the world Jesus facilitates.⁴⁶

The opportunity for mutuality is therefore a key ingredient to friendship.

While the opportunity for mutuality may exist, it is not always practiced. Sometimes friendship is offered but not reciprocated. That is the risk we take when entering into and practicing relationships of friendship. Donna Schaper described a parishioner's perspective on friendship, in her book Common Sense: About Men And Women In Ministry, that illustrates this point and recognizes the complexity of friendship. She tells a story of one a parishioner who was viewed by other parishioners as peculiar: an odd-duck. This woman's approach to Christian service and relationship was quite different from those in her community of faith.

Mrs. Peabody: We should never try to help people, or wait on them, or serve them. We should only try to be their friends. To give them hospitality. . . . I believe in friendship. [I believe] In standing close to each other and getting through tight places with other people as a kind of companion. . . . I will be a friend if I can. I can offer hospitality. And I want it offered back to me. Giving hospitality means that you may get taken now and then, and if you don't understand that, then you don't understand why Jesus was taken straight to the cross.⁴⁷

The opportunity of mutuality is not always seized, especially when we are accustomed to wrestling for our share of the power or accustomed to giving it away. Shared

⁴⁶ Heyward, Redemption of God, 38.

⁴⁷ Donna Schaper, Common Sense: About Men and Women in the Ministry (Washington, D.C.: Alban Institute, 1990), 119-20.

power is a new construct, requiring our continued efforts and patience both because it is new to us and because it is met with suspicion, especially by those who hold power-over.

Local pastors may find they are struggling with issues of power on both ends of the spectrum. There are members who will not claim their own power, who doubt their ability, and members who insist upon exerting their power and will over others, regardless of how it effects others. Finding the middle ground is a difficult task. Pastors often get tangled up in the tug-of-war that results when power is not easily shared in a community. In addition, pastors are in a bind to express their own sense of power. At the same time they are leaders and employees. They are called upon to provide leadership for a local congregation, yet they are also hired by the congregation or at least their salary is paid by the congregation and so they are prone to being treated as hired hands.

Power can also be abused by pastors who neglect to acknowledge their own needs in a situation and cross boundaries of self in ways that are destructive to others. The role of pastor is not enough to maintain boundaries of self. The professionalism of the role can instead create a sense of elitism in which the professional is set in a position over others who do not share the same educational and experiential history. The only possible guarantee against power abuse on the part of pastors rests in their ability to maintain their sense of self. This concept is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Pastors must be able to live in the middle of the power continuum in order to

empower members of the church community to do the same and in doing so work toward more mutual partnership. The activity of sharing power, the activity of mutuality also helps define what Letty Russell calls partnership or partners. She finds a New Testament basis for this concept as the new relationship with God through Christ. She writes, "such a new relationship is often described in the New Testament as the gift of *koinonia* (partnership, participation, communion, community)."⁴⁸ Russell's vision of partnership helps us to understand that it is a process in which we live and toward which we move. It is not a thing or a state that is achieved but a way of living. Russell states,

we are still in the process of becoming partners in all the relationships of our lives, and we do not yet experience the full expression of this participation in the New Creation of God.⁴⁹

The expression of friendship does not have to mean two or more people who have known one another over time, but it can lead to the practice of partnership which does occur over time. Friendship might be seen as the initial action and/or reaction while partnership could be the vision of where friendship is headed.

I recently received an act of friendship from someone who is no more than an acquaintance and even has authority in my student life. I was twelve weeks pregnant and woke up bleeding one Saturday. A close friend came to be with me and to help take care of my two-year-old son. The acquaintance had offered, through my friend,

⁴⁸ Letty M. Russell, Growth in Partnership (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 23.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 23.

to come to my home and practice some healing techniques on me. By the time she arrived and began to work I was in labor and four hours later delivered what I now know was probably an empty placenta.

Vacillating between hysteria and calm, I know had it not been for the presence of both of these women, one known to me and one unknown, there would have been no calm. There would have been no one to listen to my cries, to my anger, to my sorrow. This acquaintance acted as a friend to me in one of those tight places. Almost a complete stranger to me, she acted as a friend.

The opportunity for mutuality has yet to arise. It will be in that moment of mutuality though, that the partnership will be made possible. This very personal experience may seem inappropriate as a way to describe ministry, but ministry is very personal. It always involves the interaction of people on the most personal, intimate levels when it seeks to be relational and empowering.

Just as feminist clergy seek to restore women to history by making them subjects in the telling of history through preaching and teaching, feminist clergy seek to "treat each person as a subject"⁵⁰ rather than as an object. This is just one of the threads which connect the varying visions of feminist ministry. The threads of relational living, friendship, mutuality, shared power, partnership, empowering subjects and more, all intertwine to create a tapestry rich with the hues of diversity and resonance.

⁵⁰ Letty M. Russell, The Future of Partnership (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979), 68.

As much as feminists talk about connectedness and mutuality, perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of being a feminist clergy is that one is not in the center of one's community when that community is the traditional church. Feminist clergy live in a continuing tension between being connected and living out of a perspective that is not only foreign to their community but often abhorrent. Richard Bondi, in his book Leading God's People: Ethics for the Practice of Ministry, might include feminist clergy in what he calls the ethical leader.

These are "leaders who live on the edge of a community rather than in its center."⁵¹ They are "more likely to be aware of the conflicting stories that contend for the hearts of their communities and to be open to fresh interpretations of the stories that call people onward in life."⁵² Such a leader or minister maintains a sense of the traditions of the church community in which s/he leads while maintaining a vision of what it means to be a Christian. For feminist clergy, part of being a Christian is remembering women into history as well as interacting in ways that are not defined by only one social group.

What it means to be a Christian to most people is determined by a set of traditions based upon interpretation of scripture and tradition. What happens when clergy actually lead in ways that are in conflict with or foreign to the church's accepted tradition of leadership? What happens when clergy interpret scripture and

⁵¹ Richard Bondi, Leading God's People: Ethics for the Practice of Ministry (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 52.

⁵² Ibid.

tradition in ways foreign and even abhorrent to most of the constituency? The difficulties which arise when the pastor operates out of different understandings of expected models of leadership and expected interpretation of tradition are addressed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

Facing Conflict

When feminist clergy are intentional about teaching and preaching from a feminist perspective, we step out beyond the expectations of traditional Christianity into a realm of what is for the most part unexplored and undesirable territory. A case study is used to illustrate what happens when feminist clergy's authority is questioned as a result of teaching and preaching from a feminist perspective. Such questioning threatens the relatedness feminist clergy seek.

Relatedness is an essential component of feminist leadership and is often very difficult to develop and maintain because feminist clergy are perceived in some ways as a threat to or at least disconnected from the traditions and people of the church. Anger is a common and valid response of most feminists. It is a response of knowing deeply how women have been marginalized throughout history and how being made an object permeates almost everything we encounter. It is an experience which feminist clergy, particularly women, must claim if we are going to claim our own power and deal honestly with the issues of power and authority. The chapter concludes with a discussion of power and authority and how these concepts - - viewed from a feminist perspective - - can move us toward relationality.

Authority Questioned

When clergy live out of a feminist perspective, our authority to lead or validity

as a leader among the people of the church can be severely compromised. This can be explained under the rubric of Max Weber's models of authority. Following Weber's descriptions, clergy are granted traditional authority. Traditional authority depends on "an established belief in the sanctity of traditions and the legitimacy of the status of those exercising authority under them . . . legitimacy is bound by traditional precedents handed down from the past."¹ A ruler acting out of this authority has been granted certain status based upon a set of traditions the ruled acknowledge. The authority to lead is granted by the bureaucracies of particular denominations. Individuals must meet educational requirements and their lives must demonstrate personal standards which the church defines as essential for leadership, sometimes called the gifts and graces for ministry. These standards are born from the church's understanding of scripture and tradition.

Authority defined in this way is external: defined by outside sources. An individual's ability to act is directly related to how well s/he upholds the traditions that give her or him power to act. This understanding of authority views power as power-over. There is, however, another way of understanding authority and thus the way one views power.

As previously noted, a feminist methodology acknowledges that the development of any theology is effected by the experience of the individual or individuals doing the developing. Authority to be and to act begins with the

¹ For a description of Weber's models of authority see Sik Hung Ng, The Social Psychology of Power (London: Academic Press, 1980), 53.

individual's experience. Lynn Rhodes describes how women clergy find authority from their own experience.

These women find that their authority as clergy comes when they claim the power of their own experiences and expect others to claim the same power. Then, in mutual exchange, a faith relationship can develop. That relationship - not their ordination or their role - forms the basis of their authority for ministry.²

Relationship is a vital theme in feminist thought or as Beverly Harrison writes, "relationality is at the heart of all things."³ Harrison develops a feminist moral theology and writes,

To speak of the primacy of relationship in feminist experience, and to speak of a theology of relation . . . is, above all, to insist on the deep, total sociality of all things.⁴

However, relationship is threatened when the lines of connection between people are few or non-existent. Just as women have bridged the gender gap for centuries, both consciously and unconsciously, feminists are having to bridge the gap with patriarchy in order to help others see the connections between their lives and another way of viewing the world, especially the world of faith.

The worldview of the Christian community has long been defined within a narrow context by a small, publicly identified group of Christians. Feminists question not only these definitions, but the context in which and by which the definitions have been formed. Those who have had the privilege of defining Christian tradition, and

² Rhodes, 36.

³ Beverly Wildung Harrison, Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics, ed. Carol S. Robb (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 15.

⁴ Ibid., 16.

even Christian symbols, are also those who have been granted authority by that tradition. In the American Protestant church, this has been primarily done by white men. There has been an assumption that these definitions are correct and the tradition, therefore, is valid because they have been founded on scripture. What has been neglected to be recognized and what feminist methodology seeks to lift up is that all definitions, all interpretations are colored by human experience.⁵

When clergy choose to utilize and integrate symbols and interpretations of scripture and tradition that are informed by feminist theology, they are often met with resistance which comes in forms of trivialization or anger. Their ability to lead, to be viewed as having authority to lead, can be severely compromised. It is compromised because relationship is broken or tenuous; clergy being and acting in this vein are not at the center of the church community. Relationship requires that there be speaking and listening by all parties and is difficult for feminists to initiate and maintain. Many laity and clergy do not want to listen to feminist concerns and do not even want to speak out of their own experience because it is easier and more comfortable to let the dogma of the church do it for them. Many feminist clergy are struggling to find ways of speaking that will be both understood and accepted. Because the majority of parishioners are accustomed to the patriarchal language and way of doing things, clergy speaking from a feminist perspective seem to be speaking a foreign language.

Feminist clergy are perceived to be unrelated to the church family, something

⁵ Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, 12.

like a foreign exchange student who needs to learn *how we do it*.⁶ Clergy informed by feminism are not the only clergy who are struggling with this unrelatedness. Clergy who question or criticize the church's belief's and actions that lead to the oppression of others in any form find relatedness difficult to maintain.

Christianity began as a reform movement of the Jewish religious system and a counter-culture movement as it developed in its early stages.⁷ The tendency of any organization is to mirror or move toward stability with the society or culture in which it lives. Christianity has certainly done this. It is a temptation that continues to face the church: to take on the traditions of the surrounding culture as authoritative for its life. Leaders who question these acquisitions are what Bondi calls the ethical leader. These are "leaders who live on the edge of community rather than in its center."⁸

The activity of an ethical leader in the church is to question these acquisitions and the church's movement toward the center of its surrounding culture based upon an understanding of the Christian tradition as transforming of life and even society. Bondi warns that "the social setting of the vocation of ministry tends to pull ministers toward the center of their communities rather than toward the edge."⁹ Ethical leaders must have their hands and feet in the center of the community while keeping their

⁶ By unrelated I mean disconnected as well. The term unrelated is chosen as the opposite of related or relation. Relation is essential for empowerment.

⁷ See Burton L. Mack, The Myth of Innocence (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 124-31. This section, "The Patterns of Social Conflict," addresses some of these issues.

⁸ Bondi, 52.

⁹ Ibid., 51.

heart and voice on the edge of the community, calling it to move the boundaries of its circle of justice to include more and more people and situations.

Threatened Relationships

The problem of conflicting interpretation and the demand of ethical leadership can often lead to conflict in relationships. Feminist clergy qualify as ethical leaders and, because of the struggle to maintain relatedness, can grow easily discouraged. Relatedness is essential for feminist leadership and yet relationships are threatened by the very leadership feminist clergy offer. It is part of the paradox that feminist clergy face and in which we live.

Relatedness is often confused with being liked. Many clergy find it more agreeable to be liked than to be in relationship. Relationship means opening ourselves to the point that we will tell our story, what we feel and think, even when it is different or in conflict with those in our community. Relationship means that we will listen to the stories of others in the same manner. Bondi continues, ethical leaders are "more likely to be aware of the conflicting stories that contend for the hearts of their communities and to be open to fresh interpretations of the stories that call people onward in life."¹⁰ Such leaders cannot do this unless they are in relationship with their communities.

Relatedness is often threatened and this is one of the things that saps the energy of feminist clergy - - making the building of bridges a costly enterprise to our spiritual/emotional, intellectual and physical well being. Relatedness is threatened

¹⁰ Ibid.

when clergy will not listen or are too tired to listen: relatedness is threatened when members of the community are too frightened or threatened to listen. Following is a case study in which relatedness was threatened and made severely tenuous as a result of my own feminist interpretation of the tradition.

Case Study

I planned a series of sessions for sixth and seventh graders who were preparing for baptism. Part of the preparation included learning about how other Christians had lived out their faith in action and deed. Two of these Christians from the past included Angelina and Sarah Grimke, two white women, raised on a slave plantation, who chose to become abolitionists and speak out against slavery. They began to realize that women were also in a kind of slavery - - lacking property rights, personal rights and representation in government. In addition to being abolitionists, they were among the first to speak on behalf of women's rights.

What I wanted these young catechumens to glean from this and biographical material about other Christians, was that practicing one's Christian faith can take one into situations where one is outside the mainstream of the society and even of the church. Being faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ can be a lonely and challenging endeavor.

One mother, with whom I had a previous conflict, went to the senior pastor on a Sunday morning, directly after service, and in an agitated manner asked, "What is all this feminist stuff?" referring to the material on the Grimke sisters. As the people poured out of the sanctuary, the male senior pastor did not have opportunity to

respond in depth. This mother never approached me with her concern. She also openly refused to listen to me when I broached the subject on at least two occasions, and she refused to directly tell me what was bothering her.

The senior pastor arranged a lunch with the mother and myself at which the air was somewhat cleared and where it became evident the mother had difficulty with me even being a pastor because of my gender. The mother had, in the past, questioned the validity of my authority as pastor in references to passages from the letter to the Collosians.¹¹ At the lunch she said, "I just don't see you as a minister." For this woman, I was outside what she found to be acceptable boundaries of tradition and even symbol. As a woman, I could not clearly represent Christian tradition because of my gender. Therefore, anything I did or tried to do was suspect.

The material on the Grimke sisters also presented a threat. Here were two Christian women, unmarried, living and behaving outside what this mother considered to be the boundaries even 100 years later. This woman has imposed upon herself the household codes from Collosians abdicating her power and even her personal rights to her husband and children. Other parishioners even noted how she allowed both her husband and children to dictate what she did and when she did it.

Case Interpretation

These issues related to feminism, my lack of validity in this woman's eyes and the Grimke sisters' inappropriate behavior were swept under the rug and never addressed in subsequent conversations with the mother or other parishioners who

¹¹ See Col. 3:18, NRSV.

expressed concern over this woman's unhappiness, hoping she would not leave the church. The fear of losing a member outweighed the need to address some of the underlying issues of her unhappiness and conflict with me, the associate pastor. I found myself very angry at this woman for quite a long time. When I allowed myself to feel this anger, it was affirming for me; it affirmed my perspective of the situation and helped me avoid the temptation of trying to be liked.

While the issues surrounding this woman's unhappiness were not dealt with adequately, relationship did become a possibility once again in that the woman did not completely absent herself. It is only in the relatedness that these issues can even be brought to the fore again. If this mother had left, the doors of listening and speaking would have been closed. There is now at least the hope of them being opened again.

I have since observed that this mother has become more assertive at church since her interaction with me and with other assertive women in the church. Even the mother recognized this change. Perhaps such a change had been her initial fear.

The Response of Anger

Situations as blatant as the one described and many, many more subtle, seemingly insignificant, but derogatory comments and actions add up over time, leaving most feminist clergy weary of what seems to have become a battle on some level. Weariness or fatigue makes it much easier to be co-opted into the system. There is a temptation by leadership to be liked, as an individual, and at least to be accepted on one's own terms. One can grow tired of continually making oneself clear to others and making clear one's perspective. In an essay titled, "Sexism and the

Language of Christian Ethics," Beverly Harrison describes this fatigue from the perspective a Christian feminist ethicist.

Is it any wonder that we are sometimes tempted to see ourselves as the potential messianic deliverers of the race but at the same time experience ourselves as immobilized by the weight of heavy moral expectation we lay upon ourselves? We must be aware that our present political economy places unprecedented moral, social, and economic demands on women while at the same time weakening the social bonds of women's culture that proffered support to women in past struggles. Is it any wonder that most women are fatigued by life?¹²

The activity of communicating from a feminist perspective requires great and gentle repetition from feminists because their view is so alien and threatening to the church. What makes sense to feminist clergy will never make sense to many people within the church or society for that matter, so many just give up.

A common response of feminist clergy is anger: anger from the frustration of not being heard, no matter how clear we are in the communications of ideas and feelings. It is an anger that results from being trivialized, and treated as object rather than subject. Not being heard and having our ideas and feelings not taken seriously is tantamount to being silenced. Women in particular, who are informed by feminism, are sensitive to the silencing of voices, not just women's voices. We are aware of how our own voices have been silenced throughout our lives and aware of how women's voices throughout history have been silenced in both subtle ways and blatant, often violent ways. This silencing is intolerable to feminists and most often results in feelings of anger.

¹² Harrison, 33-34.

Anger has been deemed a socially inappropriate emotion for women to express openly, especially if it is anger at something that supports the status quo. Therefore, feminists' ideas and feelings are easily discounted with a statement like, "She is just an angry female." For fear of being trivialized even further with no hope of ever being heard, many stuff their anger into the bottle of so-called self control. Their anger implodes in despair and even depression. This is an inappropriate way to handle anger. Another inappropriate way of handling anger is directing it at individuals so that it becomes converted into personal attacks and even hatred.

Feminists are recognizing that rather than bottling up our anger or being defensive about our anger, it is essential to authentically own it so we can redirect it in ways that are not self-destructive or destructive to others. There is power in anger that is owned and made creative. Beverly Harrison notes the importance of this power in another essay entitled, "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love."

We must wrest this power of action from our very rightful anger at what has been done to us and to our sisters and to brothers who do not meet patriarchy's expectations. The deepest danger to our cause is that our anger will turn inward and lead us to portray ourselves and other women chiefly as victims rather than those who have struggled for the gift of life against incredible odds. The creative power of anger is shaped by owning this great strength of women and of others who have struggled for the full gift of life against structures of oppression.¹³

To give in to the weariness instead of finding ways to regenerate, to give in to the implosion of anger instead of owning it and using its energy to continue

¹³ Ibid., 7.

reconstructing reality, is to allow the "real force of misogyny" to take hold.¹⁴

Harrison writes,

Misogyny's real force arises only when women assert ourselves and our own power. . . . It is never the mere presence of a woman, nor the image of women, nor fear of 'femininity' that is the heart of misogyny. The core of misogyny, which has yet to be broken or even touched, is the reaction that occurs when women's concrete power is manifest, when we women live and act as full and adequate persons in our own right.¹⁵

Feminist clergy, particularly women, must expect reactions of misogyny when we "live and act as full and adequate persons in our own right" as Harrison has stated. We must expect subtle and blatant reactions of misogyny and must therefore maintain the proactive creativity of speaking and listening: speaking, without qualifications, the truth of our lives, remaining clear about who we are and listening in ways that afford other's the opportunity of reflection. We must listen by asking "thoughtful questions

¹⁴ Ibid., 5.

¹⁵ Ibid. Jean Baker Miller in Toward a New Psychology of Women addresses the reaction of men to women's expressed power. Her views express, from a psychological perspective, the misogyny women experience from some men when we express our own power. ". . . when women begin to move out of their restricted place, they threaten men in a very profound sense with the need to reintegrate many of the essentials of human development - - the essentials that women have been carrying for the total society. Women's direct use of their own powers in their own interests frequently brings a severely negative reaction from the man . . . Because of . . . this . . . many women have developed an exaggerated inner equation: the effective use of their own power means that they are wrong, even destructive." Jean Baker Miller, Toward a New Psychology of Women (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), 120. Women who express their own power receive similar reactions from other women, perhaps because other women are threatened by the need to reintegrate and share the essential of human development.

that help people reflect upon the implications of their action and beliefs."¹⁶

Such speaking and listening requires vulnerability. Vulnerability has been seen as a woman's trait, as one of woman's weaknesses, meaning woman has needed to be protected. In fact, this vulnerability is one of woman's great strengths. It is the recognition that we are not completely autonomous and need more than adequate communication between people. It is the recognition that when people refuse to be vulnerable, relatedness is made impossible.

There is a flip side to vulnerability and that is that vulnerability is by and large still understood as a weakness. For this reason, clergywomen especially have found we must be thoughtful or wise in how we share of our lives and how much we share of our lives, particularly when the recipients of what we have to share can exert power-over us. One clergywoman states it very well.

When I enter a situation where a person or group has the power, I consider there to be a negotiation situation and therefore a situation which calls for thoughtful and sensitive strategizing. I do not share the vulnerability or pain of my existence in that situation, but the dignity of my purpose.¹⁷

¹⁶ Robert Greenleaf, Servant Leadership (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 29-30. Greenleaf illustrates this power of persuasion in the life of John Woolman. During the 1740s, he questioned the morality of slave ownership as a Christian and as a Quaker. After freeing his slaves he traveled the colonies, visiting other Quakers, engaging them in a moral discussion related to their faith with questions like, "What does slavery do to you as a moral person?" and "What kind of institution are you binding over to your children?" Feminists could ask similar questions especially regarding what legacies of justice or injustice we are passing on to future generations.

¹⁷ Rhodes, 28.

Claiming Power

Owning one's anger, taking responsibility for one's anger is owning one's power or claiming one's power. It has been noted that feminist clergy, especially women, find authority for what they do as clergy "when they claim the power of their own experiences."¹⁸ Anger is an experience feminists must claim for it is an avenue of claiming power. It is a personal experience which we know and must learn to articulate just as we must learn to articulate all of our experience.

Women clergy, particularly, forget to do this: claim the power of their own experiences. Jean Baker Miller observes that "women have lived as subordinates, and as subordinates, have been led by the culture to believe that their own self-determined action is wrong and evil."¹⁹ Because of this, self-doubt prevails among women as one of our greatest common denominators and self-assertion is something that threatens our being in relationship with others.²⁰ Miller explains that

Since society so firmly encourages women to remain in this [subordinate] position, moving out of it means working against very heavy odds. To attempt to change the situation threatens women with no place to go, no alternatives, and, worst of all, total isolation and complete condemnation. Such threats can be well validated by reality, the recycled to reconfirm women's already deeply internalized fears.²¹

¹⁸ Rhodes, 36.

¹⁹ Jean Baker Miller, Women and Power, Work in Progress, no. 1 (Wellesley: Wellesley College, Stone Center, 1982), 4.

²⁰ Carol Gilligan, in her book In a Different Voice, illustrates how a woman's experience in what she knows is worn down from the time she is a young girl, running into assumptions about the norm that excludes her gender's experience.

²¹ Jean Baker Miller, Toward a New Psychology of Women, 122.

Men are socialized to claim the power of their own experience especially since their behavior is considered the norm. In claiming personal power, men present themselves and their ideas in ways that demonstrate to others they have authority for what they do.

Clergymen often speak of a honeymoon when referring to their first year at a church. The honeymoon, according to the myth, is when the pastor is accepted with great hope. He, (and I mean he), is immediately accorded authority by most of the members of the congregation. Most clergywomen, serving as the senior pastor of a church, find that the so-called honeymoon doesn't happen until the third, fourth or even fifth year. One clergywoman stated:

A male colleague asked me how the honeymoon was going when I first started at the church. I knew what he was talking about, but I responded as if I didn't know. "What do you mean?", I asked, "What honeymoon?" He just assumed my experience would be the same as his. You know, the honeymoon didn't begin until I'd been at the church for four years.²²

Most clergywomen face suspicion on the part of congregations and often internalize that suspicion, denying their own power. Another clergywoman commented on how in the second church she served, this honeymoon was experienced even sooner.

In my first church, it took almost five years before I felt accepted. In my second church, it only took two years before the honeymoon began. I approached it differently: I had more confidence and didn't wait

²² "Leaven for Leadership," Retreat of Clergywomen of the Pacific Southwest Region, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Mater Dolorosa Retreat Center, Altadena, Ca., 18-19 Sept 1992. Statement by Gayle Schoepf.

around for someone to tell me I could be minister²³.

When women claim power from their own experiences, they are perceived as having authority just as is the case with men. This can be clearly illustrated with some help from the field of communications.

When describing their experience or views, women usually use qualifying language like, "It seems to me" or "I find that." While such language can be effective when facilitating discussion, it makes one appear weak if one always uses qualifying language. Men, on the other hand are less apt to use qualifying language when describing their experience or views; the message they send is, "This is the way it is."²⁴ Women and men can use the same language and be perceived differently. When women use verbal fillers for example, "um, well, you know, I mean," it sends the message, "She can't hold a thought [while men are perceived as simply] holding or controlling conversation."²⁵ When women state clearly their experiences and views without qualifying language or verbal fillers, we appear as confident individuals who know what we're talking about and are accorded some authority.

It must be said that while clergymen do enjoy a honeymoon period for the most part, they must face the end of the honeymoon. As one clergywoman stated, "They're [men] given everything on a silver platter when they walk in and then bit by

²³ "Leaven for Leadership" Retreat. Statement by Natalie Hodgson.

²⁴ "Leaven For Leadership" Retreat. View expressed by Beth Dobkin, Professor of Communications, University of San Diego, Calif.

²⁵ William Buckley's verbal style is indicative of this use of verbal fillers.

bit, all the goodies get taken off. I'd much prefer to do it the other way."²⁶ (The other way being without the initial honeymoon.)

Power is first of all then, personal. Traditionally, power has been understood as having the ability to do something. There are problems with some of the implications of this understanding of power; it can easily be conceived of as power-over something else, the ability to control. While the doing nature of power has been the primary way of viewing power, it is not the only way. Power is also existential, that is, power has the nature of being. Charles Mesle points out in his dissertation Power and Value in Process Philosophy and Theology that Plato's definition of being is simply power and that process theologian Charles Hartshorne picks up on this idea when he writes "To be is to create."²⁷

Harrison warns that "being and doing must never be treated as polarities, [they] are two ways to view the same activity."²⁸ Most definitions of power, constructed or described primarily by male theorists within an androcentric culture, begin with doing. Perhaps the being of power is already assumed. Perhaps for men the question is "How can I use power?" while women ask, "How do I get power?"

This can be explained in terms of the symbol life of the church. Women are by our nature traditionally excluded from the nature of the divine, a god defined

²⁶ "Leaven for Leadership" Retreat, statement by Jane Wiatt.

²⁷ Charles R. Mesle, Power and Value in Process Philosophy and Theology, Ph.D. Diss., Northwestern University, 1980 (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1981), 90. "Plato's declaration in the Sophist that the definition of being is simply power is a foundational metaphysical insight." Ibid.

²⁸ Harrison, 11.

within the parameters of male gender. As Donna Schaper points out in Common Sense: About Men and Women in Ministry:

Over time these exclusions take an enormous toll on our ability to define our own criteria. If we are all human beings, but men are like gods and women are not, then we are reduced to a subhuman criteria. . . . Men should create and we should clean up. We eventually exclude ourselves, by our little hiding tricks, from covenantal responsibilities.²⁹

In this framework of reality, women cannot picture ourselves as beings imbued with power by our very existence.

Power is also relational. Our being is known not in a vacuum; relationships are what help to form who we are from the time of birth to wherever we are presently. The church has tried to control relationships through a hierarchical approach. Being set on a ladder of relationships, one can become lonely, so we turn our attention and affection to a divinity that is set above us in hopes "he" will reach down to us. Heyward describes this approach to relatedness from a theological perspective.

Christian theologies have tended to foster loneliness (separation, division, estrangement) as the human condition. Our underlying assumption has been that human bonding in the world is less good than our worship of a lofty deity who needs our isolation if "He" is to be "God". . . . The experience of relation is fundamental and constitutive of human beings; and that it is only within this experience . . . as it is happening here and now . . . that we may realize that the power in relation is God.³⁰

Christians claim power from the divine called God. We cannot know God

²⁹ Schaper, 105.

³⁰ Heyward, Redemption of God: 1-2.

except through the concrete relationships of our past, present and even future. James Fowler has recognized that our knowledge of God develops through our relationships, even from the time of our infancy in our relationship with our primary caregivers.³¹ Our knowledge of God begins in relationship. The source of our power is in relation or as Heyward has put it, "God is our power in relation."³² Knowing who we are, in relation to others through listening and speaking is one way of claiming power.

So what are the implications of such understandings of power for clergy choosing to be informed by feminism. For women who are often unaware that they actually have power and for men who often assume they have power because they were socialized to believe that, it is to become conscious of the sources of their power, to be aware of the power of their being. Such awareness cultivates self-understanding: an understanding of one's abilities and one's limits. This leads to clearer speaking and more effective listening. It leads to clearer speaking simply because one's self-awareness is heightened, one is more sure of self. Listening becomes more effective because one is able to hear beyond one's own concerns since one is already able to articulate them. Speaking and listening build trust and help create power in relation. Rhodes elaborates on trust:

Only in telling [speaking] the truth of our experiences do we create the possibility for trust and more truth-telling to develop around us. . . . Trust allows us to be open to the truth of others' experiences and

³¹ James W. Fowler, Stages Of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 121.

³² Heyward, Redemption of God, 6.

thus be open to others' insights, knowledge, and meaning.³³

Authority becomes the agency by which power moves toward the doing mode.³⁴ Weber, in describing three types of authority, demonstrates that whatever the type of authority, it is a granting/claiming of power to/by an individual: to lead, to rule, to govern. Feminists, recognizing that authority can lead to power-over activity and that it is often viewed as being granted from outside the individual, affirm that authority can also be an empowering agency for both the individual who leads as well as for the community in which the individual leads. In fact, if authority does not act as an agency for empowerment then it indicates a misuse or abuse of power.³⁵

Just as power is relational, so, too, is authority. The authority to do is gained from experience: experience in relationships. The authority to do is acknowledged by those to whom leaders have listened and spoken. This activity of listening and speaking builds trust. The element of trust is essential for this kind of authority - - relational based authority.

A sign of effective leadership is in the strengthening or empowering of the people among whom the leader lives. Robert Greenleaf states "true listening builds strength in other people."³⁶ Greenleaf later points out that coercive power (power-over) is used to "dominate and manipulate people . . . individuals are coerced into a

³³ Rhodes, 37.

³⁴ Ibid., 30.

³⁵ Ibid., 27-28.

³⁶ Greenleaf, 17.

predetermined path. Even if it is good for them, if they experience nothing else, ultimately their autonomy will be diminished."³⁷ Greenleaf seems to place a high premium on autonomy, but he does not see autonomy as an end, rather as a step toward more complete relationship. For women though, relationship usually precedes autonomy, that is women find strength for being who we are as individuals through our relationships with others. Perhaps even women recognize what is also true for men: there can be no individual without a set of relationships.

To reframe Greenleaf's ideas on empowering people, it can be said that the leader uses "the power of persuasion [listening and speaking] . . . to create opportunity and alternatives so that individuals may"³⁸ express their own experiences, claim the power within them and find the connections between their experiences and the experiences of others thus claiming a relational power. (Greenleaf sees the goal as helping individuals choose and build autonomy.)

Conclusions

We have seen that the diverse expectations of ministerial leadership, both in how we lead and in what we preach and teach, makes it difficult to maintain and develop relatedness in our communities. Without some level of relatedness our authority to act as clergy is severely hampered. Feminist clergy find that their authority is often hampered because they stand on the edge of the community, perceived of as unrelated to the traditions and people of the church. This results in

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 41-42.

feelings of frustration and even anger. These feelings and all experience of feminist clergy must be owned and expressed.

It is through the speaking of our experience, finding and making the connections between our experiences and those of the people in the pew that relatedness is made possible. This is probably why feminist clergy have *not* been thrown out of the church yet. We claim the power of our own experiences and in so doing have touched or connected with the experience of others. In this process we hear into speech the truth of our own lives and the lives of those with whom we serve.

This is one of the ways feminist clergy are empowered: when we see that our leadership does have an effect, that people are moved to rethink reality and claim their own experiences as valid and powerful. These gifts are often few and far between, as they are for all clergy. If feminist clergy are going to continue to live on the edge of our community, calling the community to widen its boundaries of inclusion, we must have a continuing source of empowerment. In the next chapter this critical issue is explored.

CHAPTER 4

Empowerment for Maintaining Leadership of Feminist Clergy

It has been established in Chapter 2 that the leadership of feminist clergy is essential for the complete ministry of the church. Feminist methodology and insights provide windows to half the church's constituency: women. Feminist sensitivity also seeks to listen to and incorporate the voices and experiences of so-called minority groups who have been left out of the power loop.

The church as an institution can be a means of incorporating a myriad of voices, and in bringing them to speech, becomes a moral agent of social change. However, the church behaves more like a bureaucracy than it does an institution and the leaders within the church often behave more like the guardians of tradition than we do as prophets and leaders. Before venturing into how feminist clergy can be empowered, it is important to set the stage with a vision of what the church as institution must strive to look like and what kind of leadership is necessary to keep this vision alive. After this process, an understanding of empowerment will be utilized to inform how feminist clergy can remain within the institutional church as effective leaders and as whole people.

A Vision of the Church as Institution

Robert Greenleaf, in Servant Leadership, points out that the etymology of the

word institution reveals it to mean "something that enlarges and liberates."¹ From there he develops his own definition of institution:

An institution is a gathering of persons who have accepted a common purpose, and a common discipline to guide the pursuit of that purpose, to the end that each involved person reached high fulfillment as a person, through serving and being served by the common venture, than would be achieved alone or in a less committed relationship.²

Greenleaf's development of this idea of institution counters many assumptions about what an institution is and how it functions. What many people might assume to be an institution, Greenleaf calls a bureaucracy which "all institutions tend to become."³ According to Greenleaf a bureaucracy is "a system that has become narrow, rigid and formal, depends on precedent and lacks initiative and resourcefulness."⁴

Unfortunately, the church is more like a bureaucracy than an institution. The church defines its theology within the narrow parameters of patriarchy. It depends upon tradition, the precedent of past, in order to maintain its authority. A critique or reinterpretation of tradition or precedent is viewed as a threat and even a disregard for the holiness or at least importance of tradition. The church is often accused of being ten to twenty years behind the world in which it lives. A blatant example of this was when Pope John Paul II recently acknowledged that Galileo Galilei was right: the

¹ Greenleaf, 237.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

earth moves - - it is not the center of the universe. American Protestant churches are lagging behind in their assumptions regarding the working patterns of women. The assumption is still often made that most married women with children do not work outside the home. Daytime programming of classes and events during the week for both adults and young children demonstrate this lag. Women at work cannot attend and have difficulty getting children to events during the week.

If the church is going to be an institution, a place that "enlarges and liberates, [where] each involved person reaches higher fulfillment as a person,"⁵ the constituency of the church will need to listen to its leaders who have a prophetic vision. For several decades, many clergy in Protestant churches have opted not to introduce higher biblical criticism to their churches or even let their preaching be informed by anything other than the status quo. While some clergy lifted high the cause of justice and peace in speaking out for civil rights and against the Vietnam War, the structures of patriarchy were never questioned, even though the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s called for such questioning. When women raise questions about patriarchal assumptions, we are told to wait: we are being selfish because there are more important concerns.

Feminists question even this valuing of justice issues as if one is more important or valid than another. We recognize and want to affirm the interrelatedness of these issues. To continue separating justice issues is to continue injustice. Feminists also recognize and want to lift up the assertion that the subordinate place of

⁵ Ibid.

women is at the heart of justice issues for all marginalized groups. Jean Lipman-Blumen describes in Gender Roles and Power how the subordination of women is the foundation for all other forms of oppression.

The power relationship between men and women is at the very heart of the social fabric. Once it begins to unravel, so do all other power relationships. . . . The need to maintain women's subordination at home and in the world at large is deep seated, since in some inchoate way both women and men understand that the power relationship between the genders is the blueprint for all other relationships. . . . This blueprint, itself presumably patterned after the divine relationship between God and humans portrayed in traditional Western religious systems, is then used to fashion all other power relationships. The blueprint itself becomes sacred.⁶

Still today, there are many clergy who choose to ignore the questions surrounding the patriarchal assumptions of the church while raising justice issues of poverty and racism. By maintaining the patriarchal facade, these clergy allow their congregations a comfort level that affords the clergy space in which to lift up these justice issues, or so the assumption goes. I contend that by maintaining the patriarchal facade, by not questioning and bringing to the fore the patriarchal assumptions of scripture and tradition, these clergy help uphold the systems that make for things like poverty and racism.

If clergy are going to be prophetic, we need to be wholly prophetic. Feminist clergy are working toward this vision of the prophetic. Greenleaf's view of the leader as prophet illuminates the difficulties feminist clergy face. He recognizes that there are voices "speaking cogently all of the time . . . addressing the problems of the day

⁶ Jean Lipman-Blumen, Gender Roles and Power (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1984), 48.

and pointing to a better way."⁷ The difficulty lies not in the absence of speaking voices but in the absence or resistance of listening ears. Greenleaf writes:

The variable that marks some periods as barren and some as rich in prophetic vision is in the interest, the level of seeking, the responsiveness of the hearers. . . . Prophets grow in stature as people respond to their message. If their attempts are ignored or spurned, their talent may wither away.⁸

This is the case with feminist clergy: they are either conforming their voices to the hearers or leaving the church.

I maintain that the church needs these voices if it is to live toward a vision of institution instead of bureaucracy. However, the church continues to silence these voices by trivializing them and especially by ignoring them. How can feminist clergy continue to speak and act out of a feminist perspective in what is sometimes a hostile, and other times an uninterested environment?

First of all, feminist clergy must heed the words of sociologist Julian Rappaport who maintains that leaders "who are interested in social change must never allow themselves the privilege of being in the majority."⁹ Feminist clergy must accept that in living on the edge of the community as ethical leaders, we will most definitely be out of the mainstream. Our task or mission as leaders of social change is to "confront the discovered paradoxes by pushing them in the ignored direction."¹⁰

⁷ Greenleaf, 8.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Rappaport, 143.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Paradoxes are part of our existence; they become problems when one side is maximized over another. For example, the church is a paradox. The language and theology of the church is based on patriarchal assumptions, while over half of the church's constituency is female. The patriarchal assumptions that fuel the church's language and theology is the side of the paradox that has been maximized over the experience of women, which stands as the other side of this paradox. The ignored direction is toward the experience of the female gender. In pushing the paradox in this direction, feminist clergy move for social change. If we are part of the majority, Rappaport suggests we "run the risk of losing [our] grasp of the paradox"¹¹ - - which is essential if we are truly interested in social change.

When feminist clergy choose to openly speak and act out of feminist assumptions, we are choosing to be a minority, choosing to accept the power of our own experiences in spite of voices that seek to disempower us. This activity of disempowerment occurs most effectively in verbal communications from others.

Our self-concept, how we experience and understand ourself and the world, can be easily disconfirmed if we allow responses of others, who are threatened by our feminism and by our vision of the church, to define who we are. Such responses include ignoring, tangential responses - - picking up on a small point we made, and incongruous responses, e.g., a statement that demonstrates we are not understood. "The reality is that we will be made fun of and marginalized by those we threaten.

¹¹ Ibid.

But this need not affect our self-esteem."¹²

Acknowledging our place on the edge of our communities and maintaining our self-concept are ways of undergirding our feminist perspective. These activities, particularly maintaining our self-concept, are related to a process of empowerment for undergirding the leadership of feminist clergy. When we are able to maintain our self-concept amidst hostility and trivialization we are claiming the authority of our experiences. To be sure, this claiming of the authority of our own self-concept, the sum of our experiences is an empowering activity. Our own authority can be then an agency for empowerment.

Authority: An Agency for Empowerment

Letty Russell, in her essay "Authority and the Challenge of Feminist Interpretation," describes the reframing of authority when she writes:

The feminist paradigm of authority is a shift in interpretive framework that affects all the authority structures in religion and society, including the claim that scripture evokes our consent to faith and action. The prevailing paradigm of authority in Christian and Jewish religion is one of authority as domination.¹³

Feminists question the so-called objectivity of authority granted from the outside, and instead recognize that all authority is first personal, deriving from the person her/himself.

¹² Barbara Graves, Summary Newsletter from "Leaven for Leadership" Retreat, p. 2.

¹³ Letty M. Russell, "Authority and the Challenge of Feminist Interpretation," in Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 143, quoted in Smith, 45-46.

Men have been able to claim authority for what they do from outside themselves because those sources of tradition, and even worldview, have been defined within the framework of their gender. In essence, while claiming authority from beyond their person or self they are really at the same time claiming authority that is personal, because their gender identity is intimately related to the traditions and worldview of a male defined, male expressed world. Women, on the other hand, struggle with claiming authority from the outside and from within.

When women, particularly feminists, claim authority from the outside structures of church and society, we often feel we must give up some of our integrity as feminists to do so. The dilemma goes something like this. In order to be granted authority from these patriarchal structures we must collude in undergirding them. In order to claim authority from these structures we must have a voice in how they are constructed, but we do not. That leads us to the notion of personal authority.

Men tend to be more comfortable with personal authority than women do; women cannot be comfortable with personal authority under the present circumstances. Because women's voices and experiences as subject are absent from the construction of reality, we feel as if we are on shaky ground when claiming a personal authority which is outside the realm of that reality. Yet it is this very category of personal authority that can provide the foundation from which women can be who we are in the world. This is true for men as well because men must recognize that their personal authority has been undergirded by a gender bias that has kept women from experiencing their personal authority.

In Female Authority: Empowering Women Through Psychotherapy, Polly

Young-Eisendrath and Florence Wiedemann note:

Women who grow up and are socialized in a patriarchal culture are forced to exclude authority from their self-concept. They must retrieve it from experiences in the masculine world of culture and then convert these experiences to confidence in themselves.¹⁴

Authority is the confidence to be who we are and to act out who we are in the world. It becomes the foundation of our activity. Feminists acknowledge the authority of the experience of each person. "To claim the authority of one's own experience is not to be individualistic."¹⁵ However, it is to recognize the validity of each person as "both unique and part of a larger interwoven reality."¹⁶

Young-Eisendrath and Wiedemann's definition of personal authority provides a clear understanding of the concept:

Personal authority is the ability to validate one's own thoughts and actions as good and true. It develops gradually as others recognize and communicate the values of one's ideas and contributions.¹⁷

The challenge for women whose personal authority cannot be discerned in the constructs of a patriarchal society is to claim their personal authority from within their self. This is also the challenge for men who recognize that their personal authority has actually been validated in large part by a gender bias that has excluded women.

¹⁴ Polly Young-Eisendrath and Florence Wiedemann, Female Authority: Empowering Women Through Psychotherapy (New York: Guilford Press, 1987), 9.

¹⁵ Rhodes, 34.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Young-Eisendrath and Wiedemann, 9.

Both women and men who desire to incorporate women's experience and voice as subject rather than object must be willing to claim that their authority is first of all personal.

Some clergy may have difficulties accepting this because as clergy we are supposedly called by God who, standing outside of us, authorizes our ministry as pastors. When I first began to work in a church after my ordination, I made the erroneous assumption that I had been granted authority to perform my role as pastor. (Note the patriarchal language: *granted* authority; perform; role rather than relationship.) I thought parishioners would automatically accord me respect and listen to my opinions and see value in them. After all, I was educated and given the stamp of approval at ordination. When authority to do my job was not forthcoming from the parishioners who had hired me, I had nothing else to fall back on. I felt not only incompetent but impotent as well. The authority from the outside god was vaporous and unreliable. I needed something that would empower me in my work and in my person.

The granting of authority from the outside is supposed to insure an objectivity. Claiming personal authority is very subjective and runs the risk of power abuse and power misuse. In claiming personal authority as the primary source of our power, are we simply diving straight into a sea of subjectivism? Feminists argue we have already been swimming around in such a sea without benefit of the female gender's subjectivism. To give up the god outside who calls us to serve as pastors is to give up the foundations of much power abuse within the church and even society. It is too

easy to claim the call of an outside god as authority for action. The outside god doesn't seek self-reflection and self-examination.

Carter Hayward warns of subjectivism:

There is danger in assuming the authority to do anything, a danger of becoming self-absorbed, limited, parochial, dogmatic, irrational, and so forth. But if theology is to be worth doing, we do it at some risk, both boldly and with a humble awareness that our perceptions and images are limited by the boundaries of our own experiences in the world. . . . It is less a danger, I believe, than that which is inherent in a theologian's refusal to admit that she is both subject and authority of her own work.¹⁸

We must always be aware of our own subjectivism; it is both gift and burden. Our authority is always personal first.

To be feminist, our authority must first of all be personal, grounded in who we are as God/ess created us, body, mind, and spirit, and grounded also in our experiences. As creations of God/ess, God/ess dwells within us, part of the fabric of our internal and external clothing. If we are moving toward being intimately connected with the Christ who incarnates God/ess within each of us, then we allow God/ess to be part of our personal authority.

There has been much emphasis in psychology and even in general society on autonomy. The autonomous person is highly valued. But the autonomous person is one who "imposes one's will and values on others."¹⁹ Young-Eisendrath and Wiedemann continue, "As an authoritative person, one responds flexibly to a variety

¹⁸ Heyward, Redemption of God, 30.

¹⁹ Young-Eisendrath and Wiedemann, 10.

of different desires and needs from self to others."²⁰ From these observations it can be stated that the authoritative person who acts out of a clear understanding of their authority as personal authority is much more attuned to the authority of others. Such a person understands and appreciates the necessary subjectivity of the individual, and is able to operate within the diversity that reality necessitates.

Lynn Rhodes comments on this process from the perspective of women clergy:

These women find that their own authority as clergy comes when they claim the power of their own experiences and expect others to claim the same power. Then in mutual exchange, a faith relationship can develop. That relationship - not their ordination or their role - forms the basis of their authority for ministry.²¹

How is mutual exchange possible? The feminist clergy is heard regularly from the pulpit and in the classroom. It is incumbent upon these clergy to listen and to provide to other clergy this new model of listening deeply to the subjectivity of others.

The patriarchal assumption has been that authority is necessary to exert control, or one's will, over another. This view of authority as domination is not preferable or possible within the framework of personal authority as described by feminists for two reasons: (1) those who claim personal authority out of a feminist perspective recognize and appreciate the subjectivity that is part of such claims while at the same time naming the subjectivity of a claim of authority from outside sources; and (2) those who are able to claim personal authority can do so "only after (s/he) has learned . . .

²⁰ Ibid., 11.

²¹ Rhodes, 36.

to take responsibility for one's own thoughts and feelings."²²

Personal authority is not for the purpose of controlling situations or others. Personal authority is for the purpose of validating one's own self-concept and self-interest through and appreciation of the whole of our existence: body, mind, spirit, and our experience. Such an appreciation builds self-respect. Beverly Harrison writes, "If we lack self-respect we . . . become the sorts of people who can neither see nor hear each other."²³ When we can courageously claim our personal authority we can more accurately and completely implement our ideas and create and act in more authentic ways.

Relational Empowerment

Sociologist Julian Rappaport has defined the aim of empowerment to be "to enhance the possibilities for people to control their own lives."²⁴ Working out of a sociological perspective, Rappaport wants to move away from advocacy and prevention approaches in which there must be experts "who know the answers and provide them for their clients."²⁵ Feminist clergy have no experts to whom we can turn: we are the experts at what we are doing because so few have gone this road

²² Young-Eisendrath and Wiedemann, 53. The authors also state that claims of personal authority are possible "only after the individual has learned to distinguish impulse from control, to understand the consequences of interpersonal actions, to anticipate consequences, to know when one is materially and emotionally dependent," *ibid.*

²³ Harrison, 12.

²⁴ Rappaport, 154.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 155.

before. Rappaport's perspective offers possibilities because he recognizes that "empowerment implies that many competencies are already present or at least available."²⁶ We already possess the strength and insight to maintain our leadership as feminist clergy!

Another hopeful idea in Rappaport's perspective is that empowerment suggests we are collaborators. This resonates with feminist visions of relatedness, mutuality and even diversity. It is not something we have to do alone. Quite the contrary, empowerment requires relationships and relatedness in ways that do not assume the patriarchal norm.

Empowerment is being described from a variety of disciplines: sociology, theology, and psychology for example. This project relies primarily on the perspective of the discipline of psychology. From the perspective of psychology, Janet Surrey has defined empowerment as:

The motivation, freedom, and capacity to act purposefully, with the mobilization of the energies, resources, strengths, or powers of each person through a mutual relational process.²⁷

It is Surrey's definition which this chapter assumes. Surrey is concerned with the personal aspect of empowerment as well as the relational context. Empowerment happens or occurs in the context of relationships. This chapter addresses two environments in which the relational context is examined as a source of empowerment: the local church in which feminist clergy serve and a community or communities of

²⁶ Ibid., 156.

²⁷ Surrey, 2.

support outside the local church environment.

It may be difficult for feminist clergy to perceive of the local church as a source of empowerment initially, because our relationships with the parishioners with whom we serve are the very relationships that seem to disempower us. It is in the context of these relationships that we face conflict for the expression of our faith perspective. How can these relationship be a source of power?

Perhaps one way to answer this question is to say that in empowering our relationships, in taking care of our relationships with others, we move the relationships toward mutuality in which both feminist clergy and parishioner have their needs met appropriately for the relational context. That is, neither can be exploitive or exploited because of their roles in the environment of the local church. It is also unrealistic to assume that all needs of either party, feminist clergy and parishioner, will be met in the environment of the local church. This is because the mutuality of relationships within the church are always in flux due to the clergy's capacity as leaders, teachers and sometimes counselors. There is temporary inequality from time to time due to the times of crisis and passage that occur in people's lives. This concept of temporary inequality is examined later.

Because the environment of the local church does not provide for all needs of either party to be met it is appropriate for feminist clergy to seek mutual empowerment in relationships apart from the local church environment. This also provides feminist clergy more power in shaping that environment which in and of itself is empowering. No one environment or relational context can meet all of our

needs. Such an expectation is unfair. To be sure, all clergy need to form relationships of mutuality beyond the limits of the church in which we serve.

Relationships of Empowerment in the Local Church

The sources of power and authority in the local church must be clearly identified. All too often, the sources of power and authority rest in individuals who, for example, desire to control or the individuals who give the most money to the congregation. Often the pastor is viewed as the one who possesses the ultimate authority, and therefore, power, in the congregation. The authority for the community, however, does not rest in the clergyperson or in any other individual but within every individual and within the connections that tie each life to another. One might also say that the authority is also Christ; Christ is the one connection which we all share. The Christ story is the hermeneutical connection that ties our like and unlike connections together, that is, it is through the Christ events that we view ourselves, one another and our world.

Christ is manifest in everyone who claims the power of Jesus' ministry and death and the power of the resurrection of Christ. It is in claiming that power that everyone in the community opens their lives to be led by the authority of Christ. It is in claiming that power that the community receives the authority to help determine the community's course of mission and relatedness in the world. This power is shared; this power emerges in the relationships within the community.

Heyward explores the experience of relation with God and within the community of faith. In Chapter 3, her concept of God as power in relation was

introduced. It is worthy of reiterating at this point.

The experience of relation is fundamental and constructive of human being; and that it is only within this experience . . . as it is happening here and now . . . that we may realize that the power in relation is God.²⁸

Without the experience of relation, we could not even exist. It is through relationships that our self is formed and also how we come to know ourself. Heyward is stating that activity of relation is power and that this power is God.

Linell Cady, in her essay "A Feminist Christian Vision," writes,

If our theological vision is to complement a relational anthropology, it will need to avoid images of divine reality suggesting a fully integrated autonomous being existing over and against us.²⁹

As feminist clergy reconstruct reality to incorporate women's voice and experience, we are reconstructing a God/ess that cannot be autonomous and exists over and against us. The feminist vision of the divine is relational; God/ess calls us into co-creation. This relational quality of God/ess is one that can be manifest in us who claim to be created of God/ess.

Toward mutuality. Mutuality is something toward which we are working, a goal much like Letty Russell's vision of partnership, which she claims from the New Testament model of koinonia. Russell names "partnership as a new focus of relationship in which there is continuing commitment and common struggle in

²⁸ Heyward, Redemption of God, 2.

²⁹ Linell E. Cady, "Relational Love: A Feminist Christian Vision," in Embodied Love: Sensuality and Relationship as Feminist Values, ed. by Paula M. Cooley, Sharon A. Farmer and Mary Ellen Ross (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 145.

interaction with a wider community."³⁰ Her vision of koinonia as partnership echoes the pattern of mutuality. She recognizes that koinonia is a gift of grace, but that "we know commitment is more likely to grow where there is responsibility, vulnerability, equality, and trust among those who share diversity of gifts and resources."³¹ The relationship of partnership is two-sided.

Mutuality appears as a distant dream, seemingly unattainable in this life to many feminist clergy because of how we are often perceived. Because of our perceived stand against the church, and the Christian faith as a whole, we are often viewed as less than or subordinate.

Carol Pierce and Bill Page point out in A Male/Female Continuum: Paths to Collegueship, that "The main way subordinates have of changing their status is to talk about the processes in which they find themselves."³² In defining the situation, the context, we are entering ourselves into the relational context on a par with those who hold us suspect. It is moving ourselves into the arena of activity in which we begin to "feel able to have an impact" on others.³³ Certainly we have been impacted by the relationships or we would not feel a need to respond. "The capacity to be moved and to respond and to move the other represents the fundamental core of

³⁰ Russell, Growth in Partnership, 29.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Carol Pierce and Bill Page, A Male/Female Continuum: Paths to Collegueship, (Laconia, N.H.: New Dynamics, 1988), 28.

³³ Surrey, 4.

relational empowerment."³⁴

When we, as feminist clergy, speak of mutuality we must be aware that the first step in being empowered through the mutuality of relationships in the local church is to initiate changes in the way we are perceived as subordinate. It is not that we are already in a dominant posture encouraging laity to join us or even taking on the often assumed subordinate role of laity in order to create equity. We are in a position of subordinate and must be open to opportunities to name the processes that keep others viewing us as subordinate, to challenge the positions others maintain by building trust through listening and in finding the connections in relationships with others. Naming the process, building trust and finding the connections is acting in proactive, powerful ways; it is recognizing we are affected and at the same time effect others.

When women, in particular, act in powerful ways, we "fear the possibility of limiting or putting down another person."³⁵ We need to be able to increase our own power while simultaneously enhancing the power of others. Doing so is possible within relationships of mutuality. Ego-boundaries are flexible, allowing for give and take. Boundaries are not meshed; neither are they rigid. Mutuality allows for the dignity of each person to be recognized within the context of the relationship. Both or all parties benefit by being in the relationship.

Relationships between clergy and parishioners can be a source of power for

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Jean Baker Miller, Women and Power, 2.

clergy as well as laity. Leaders can be empowered by the people among whom they lead. When feminist clergy nurture a highly differentiated sense of self for ourselves, we can act out of our self in ways that help maintain healthy boundaries between us and the people among whom we serve. Traditionally, that boundary has been created by the role clergy play, but that role does not provide the assurance that boundaries will not be crossed by either clergy or parishioner. The assumption that there is safety in the role of clergy for both parishioner and clergy is a false assumption.³⁶

In addition, the role of the clergy has continued to be professionalized, with educational requirements similar to those for medical doctors, college professors and teachers. This movement exacerbates the separation between clergy and laity, running the risk of creating an elitist clergy, something that puts a strain on notions of Christian community, particularly from a free-church perspective.³⁷ Conscious and unconscious assumptions of an elitist position can lead clergy to both intentional and even unintentional abuse of the power of our clerical role.

The only assurance of the maintenance of healthy and non-abusive relationships

³⁶ Marie Fortune, for example has written about how the so-called boundary of the clergy role is easily crossed in a case of sexual abuse perpetrated by a clergyman, abusing the power of his position over parishioners. See Marie Fortune, Is Nothing Sacred? (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989).

³⁷ As a member of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), it has been my observation that this separation of clergy and laity is being exacerbated by the continued push for a professional clergy, in spite of the fact that the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has valued an educated clergy. The status of the laity is on par with that of the clergy. Lay elders are able to perform the functions usually delegated to clergy: baptism and celebration of the Lord's Supper. Clergy in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) are a professional class of Christians whose role is tempered by the status of the laity.

is the maintenance of a well-differentiated self within the context of relationships. An individual nurtures a well-differentiated self through the activity of self-definition which involves both self-reflection and self-examination. (This concept of self-definition is further explored in Chapter 5.) The well-differentiated self is not maintained by rigid ego boundaries but by fluid ego boundaries. For example, an individual is confident (authoritative) enough in who s/he is to not be threatened by "a momentary overlap of self and other,"³⁸ or moments of empathy. Personal empowerment requires "the capacity to engage in an open mutually empathic, relational process."³⁹ Surrey explains that this process,

rests on the maintenance of fluid "ego boundaries" and the capacity to be responsive and "moved" by the thoughts, perceptions, and feeling states of the other person. In such an empowering interaction, both people feel able to have an impact on each other and on the movement or "flow" of the interaction.⁴⁰

Both parties can benefit in such a relational context.

Carter Heyward describes the relation of God to Jesus and Jesus to God in such a way that demonstrates how both parties benefit.

In Jesus' relation to God, Jesus grows with God in love. It is a relation in which each gives and receives and stands out as distinct from the other. . . . Jesus is God's child who grows in relation to God and becomes God's friend in a voluntary and mutual relation. God is parent in that God is resource for Jesus' growth in power. But it may be equally appropriate . . . to image God as Jesus' child, whose growth in

³⁸ Judith V. Jordan, "Empathy and the Mother-Daughter Relationship" in Women and Empathy, by Judith V. Jordan, Janet Surrey, and Alexandra G. Kaplan, Work In Progress, no. 2 (Wellesley: Wellesley College, Stone Center, 1983), 3.

³⁹ Surrey, 4.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

the world Jesus facilitates.⁴¹

This is a much different understanding of the relation of God to Jesus and Jesus to God than is traditionally expressed. Traditionally, Jesus, as God incarnate, has no choice or contribution to make on his own merit. So fused are the personalities in the doctrine of the trinity that the relation must remain hierarchical in order to work. Reciprocity is not essential. This traditional understanding of this relation has been used to justify and underscore hierarchical relationships among people. In Heyward's model, reciprocity is essential, thus making a model of mutuality among people theologically possible.

The relationship which has been most espoused within the church has been that of Christian self-sacrificial love.⁴² This type of relationship has come under much scrutiny more recently because it idealizes selflessness. People who live in oppressive situations are already in a position of having little or no self. Such a doctrine is complicit in reinforcing social inequality.⁴³ The relational characteristic of love has been subsumed under the activity of love purely for the other; it is completely other directed. Cady recommends a reclaiming of the relational quality of love for Christianity. Doing so "establishes a relationship between the self and the other that alters the basis from which the self acts."⁴⁴

⁴¹ Heyward, Redemption of God, 38.

⁴² Cady, 140.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Most of the church's understanding of pastoral ministry comes to us from Timothy 1, Timothy 2, and Titus, sometimes referred to as the pastoral epistles. For example, passages from this portion of scripture are used to prohibit women from the pastoral ministry (1 Tim. 2:12-15). There are ladders of relationships outlined in the epistles, making mutuality an impossibility. Instead, we need to embrace the ministry of Jesus more completely as a model of our own ministry. Jesus stepped out of his role as a male and as a leader over and over again when he stepped into relationship with people considered to be on the edges or outside of society.

For example, in the gospels Jesus moved from his sense of relatedness to and with God, which constitutes his sense of self, into relationships of mutuality. There is much evidence that Jesus was affected by the relationships he was part of, even the ones which seem to be only brief encounters. For instance, the encounter with the woman with the hemorrhage was one such encounter. In that encounter, Jesus felt the power go from him and became aware of a connection someone else made with him. He wept and grieved for his friend Lazarus. He allowed himself to be rebuked by the Syrophoenician woman who questioned his assumptions regarding his ministry to the people of Israel only.⁴⁵ The woman at the well engaged him in a theological dialogue. Jesus listened and spoke with others out of a sense of his relatedness to God, a relation of mutuality. This was his sense of self out of which he acted much of his ministry.

If feminist clergy are going to remain in the church, we must be able to build

⁴⁵ See Mark 7:24-30, NRSV.

relationships of mutuality that are beneficial to us within the local church. This does not mean that we become intimate friends with all those in our midst, but it does imply that we approach relationships with parishioners in ways that make it possible for us to act out of our sense of self in our role rather than only out of our role as pastor. In much of the time we spend with parishioners, we are performing the functions of our role as clergy: preaching, teaching, calling on the sick, counseling, etc. There is little time to relate with parishioners out of our self. Yet this is an essential element of moving toward mutuality.

We must spend time with parishioners in which we do not have to function as clergy. This happens around dinner tables, on backpacking trips, during workdays, anything in which we are able to first relate out of our self. It is a matter of building friendship. When we are able to do this, it enriches the times we have to relate out of our role, for we have moved toward relationships of mutuality. In fact, rather than compartmentalizing our life - - acting out of our role in the local church context and relating out of self with individuals outside the local church context - - we can act out of our self-in-role. When we allow our self to be more fully present in our role as clergy, we move toward mutuality and enhance our ministry with an increased genuine presence.

One clergywoman attempted to bridge the gap between acting out of her self and out of her role as clergy when she invited all the committees of the church to have their meetings at her home during the month of December. She did this two years in a row. Dinner was provided for committee members and if a committee had

an agenda for that month they could go ahead and have a regular meeting. This clergywoman was trying to model hospitality and comforting others by sharing her hospitality and comfort with parishioners. She demonstrated friendship as well. It was also a way for her to say thank you for their work, which was not routinely recognized in this particular church.

Many people are uncomfortable with this approach because it upsets assumed power arrangements. Judith Jordan describes a situation involving one of her clients, a female lawyer who faced ridicule from a co-worker because of how she related to her client:

A colleague told her she could be a terrific lawyer if only she didn't get so involved with her clients' problems. She accepted his criticism, feeling perhaps she cared too much for the people with whom she worked. . . . Expressing a concern for the subjective well-being of the client, engaging in a relationship with some mutuality, was seen as threatening an important power base. . . . Instead of feeling validated for the particular way she was practicing law, which included caring and mutuality, she was left feeling as if she had to keep those more female characteristics out of the office.⁴⁶

Women's way of leadership is generally different, but rather than accepting the validity of our way of being and acting in the world, we instead accept the criticism of those who point out that we are not doing it *the right way*, particularly if we are being and acting in what have been traditionally male roles. After I had been working as an associate pastor for a year, the senior pastor commented that one of my strengths was my ability to develop friendships, but that this was a liability of which I

⁴⁶ Judith V. Jordan, The Meaning of Mutuality, Work in Progress, no. 23 (Wellesley: Wellesly College, Stone Center, 1986), 11.

must also be careful. He felt I should not become too close to members of the church. However, were it not for the relationships I had developed in the church, my ability to be an effective leader would never have come to fruition, my feminist preaching and teaching would have found no ears, and there would be no reason for me to remain in the church.

Relationships of mutuality require empathy, and empathy "always [comes] first at the expense of valuing one's own experience."⁴⁷ Feminist clergy, then, must first value our own experience. Because in the activity of empathy there is a momentary overlap of self and other, feminist clergy must have a "high level of psychological development and ego strength. In order empathize, one must have a well-differentiated sense of self, in addition to an appreciation of, and sensitivity to the differentness as well as the sameness of the other person."⁴⁸

Empathy also makes us vulnerable, even when we have a well differentiated sense of self. We can and will get hurt. Heyward reminds us of this inevitability.

To sustain power in relation is to suffer pain in broken relation, including one's own. To suffer the possibility of effecting good in the world is to suffer also the evil of broken relational power in human life. There is no way to avoid pain. There is only the choice between pain steeped in passion, and pain incurred through dispassionate invulnerability to relation.⁴⁹

To choose mutuality requires of us empathy; it is to choose vulnerability which requires strength. Strength comes in the form of a well-differentiated sense of self.

⁴⁷ Jordan, "Empathy and the Mother-Daughter Relationship," 3.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Heyward, Redemption of God, 54.

Maintaining a well-differentiated sense of self is an ongoing process that helps us relate with others in more mutually empowering ways.

When clergy do not maintain a well differentiated sense of self, we can fall into the trap of allowing our unacknowledged needs to lead us to the inappropriate crossing of boundaries. When clergy maintain a well differentiated sense of self, this helps to insure that laity will not be the victims of inappropriate behavior on the part of clergy, but it does not insure that laity will not try to victimize clergy. As Heyward points out, there is no way to avoid pain and be in relation. Since it is impossible to completely absent ourselves from relation, it is impossible to truly avoid pain. Non-relation is not an option; it is both a theological and anthropological impossibility. We are always related to one another in some way. It is a matter of what kind of relationship we are capable of choosing and maintaining.

Not all parishioners are going to be capable of being involved in relationships of mutuality. Parishioners who are capable of mutual relationships will encounter life situations in which they will not be able to be in a relationship of mutuality with clergy; they will need clergy to act out of their role as counselor or teacher at times of crisis and life passages. Therefore, it is essential for clergy to have another category of relationship that is protective of all individuals involved while leaving open the option of mutuality. It is called temporary inequality.

Temporary inequality. Temporary inequality is defined by Jean Baker Miller in the following way:

The lesser party is socially defined as unequal [the relationships between parents and children, teachers and students]. . . . The superior

person is supposed to engage with the lesser in such a way as to bring the lesser member up to full parity. . . . the paramount goal is to end the relationship of inequality.⁵⁰

Clergy find that, due to crisis and passage events in the lives of parishioners, we must be able to move in and out of temporary inequality with people in order to foster their wholeness and our own. Even parishioners who are not be capable of mutuality during our tenure must be treated as persons in temporary inequality, capable of moving toward relationships of mutuality. If the inequality of the relationship is not seen as temporary, we as clergy run the risk of viewing the other as a person of less intrinsic worth. We also run the risk of putting ourselves in a position of power-over the other. Both of these risks can have devastating outcomes of power abuse and misuse if mutuality is not kept as a goal (sexual impropriety, e.g.).

There is a problem with the use of the term *temporary inequality* which must be addressed. The term *temporary inequality* assumes that equality is the goal. However, equality assumes a static relationship in which the involved parties are always able to give and receive the same in both quantity and quality. Mutuality is instead the proposed goal of all relationships, including that of temporary inequality, because it allows a reciprocity that is more flexible. *Temporary inequality* also assumes that roles will change as individuals move toward equality. Clergy and laity, however, maintain their roles. I am therefore using the term *temporary inequality* to address how clergy and laity function within situations in which the laity's needs must be first and foremost in the relationship. One could argue that this is still a

⁵⁰ Jean Baker Miller, Toward a New Psychology of Women, 4.

relationship of mutuality in which the needs of one party are being given precedence over the other's due to the situation. However, it is not always appropriate for clergy to seek out laity to meet our own needs.

Many clergy have experienced reciprocity from laity in the midst of their own crisis. However, some situations are not appropriate for clergy to seek for our needs to be met. (One example is when a clergy is in conflict with one church member, it is inappropriate to use another member as a dumping ground for our hurts and frustrations. This can pit parishioners against one another with the pastor in between.) Clergy need to be comfortable in the movement between temporary inequality and mutuality.

It is because we do have a role as a clergyperson that we are able to move in and out of relationships of temporary inequality and mutuality. In earlier chapters I stated that roles can inhibit relationality, especially when they are adhered to rigidly. Yet our role as a clergyperson can actually afford us the opportunity of more flexible ego boundaries when we are aware of our sense of self and allow our sense of self to inform our role. The role of clergy can make it possible to move into people's lives during times of crisis in a way that brings them the most comfort and healing. We can first act out of our role as clergy temporarily when we engage people who are in crisis or transitions points of their lives, but we must take our sense of mutuality and especially our sense of friendship with us as well. This serves to further our authenticity in these situations: to act out of our self-in-role. The clergy role must never become a retreat in which to protect ourselves from the pain of the other, only a

vehicle by which we maintain ego boundaries for the sake of those with whom we have relationships of temporary inequality.

The activity of being our self-in role can be illustrated in how many women clergy are perceived as we prepare for and perform funeral/memorial services. The death of a family member or friend is a cause for crisis in people's lives and during this time, clergy are especially aware of our role as comforter and counselor. After a funeral or memorial service, those who have attended generally tell the pastor it was a nice service. I have found, however, that people will comment positively regarding a funeral/memorial service that I did or my participation in such a service long after the service itself. Many parishioners have commented on how well I do funerals. This is not an occasion to boast but an occasion to point out that I am very conscious of doing funerals in a way that is much different from many of my white, male counterparts. Perhaps the difference lies in the ability and/or comfort with demonstrating emotion as well as being personal in one's presentation. From my perspective, this is this individual's "Last Hurrah," so to speak. It deserves my time, my thought and feeling and the service must reflect not only who God is but who this person has been. This requires listening as deeply as possible to those mourning, regardless if they are church members or complete strangers. (Listening deeply is discussed in Chapter 5.)

I have heard laity comment about funerals they have attended where they checked the service card to make sure they were in the right place. The clergy person in charge was so detached, so impersonal that the service for the deceased seemed almost canned. This detached approach has been an acceptable mode of operation for

clergy. Yet as clergywomen, and particularly feminist clergywomen, become more visible to the public in the role of clergy, such detachment will hopefully become inappropriate.

One clergywoman commented that the local funeral director would call her first to do funerals for people who had no formal church affiliation. He asked her before other local clergymen because she did a much better service. She would meet with the family, personalize the service and bring herself into the activity. (The funeral director often could not convince people of this clergywoman's adequacy and preferred a male counterpart.) When clergy act out of our self-in-role, we are perceived as being genuine because we are being genuine. Such true perceptions are the basis of trust and eventually mutuality.

Relationships of Empowerment Beyond the Local Church

There are two types of relationships available to clergy beyond relationships in the local church: (1) clergy groups and (2) peer relationships. Clergy groups occur in the context of ministerial associations in communities and denominational districts or associations, usually determined by geographical proximity. These relationships are determined by time and location more than by choice of individual clergy involved. Gatherings in this context are formalized, that is they occur at particular times, usually with a particular, set agenda. I define peer relationships as those which can occur with clergy and non-clergy alike in a more informal context than clergy groups, though they are not limited to informality. These relationships are determined by shared values and perceptions of the world, marked particularly by a sensitivity to feminist

values and a feminist critique.

Both of these relationships are important for feminist clergy. The first is important because it maintains our presence among other clergy who are still blind to the patriarchal assumption. The feminist perspective and critique must remain here to influence change among the church leadership both denominationally and ecumenically, thus making the whole church friendlier to women. Peer relationships are essential for the mental, emotional, spiritual and even physical health of feminist clergy. If feminist clergy are to be relational we must not feel alone in our concerns and values.

Clergy groups. Many clergy gather monthly in more than one grouping. Community ministerial associations comprise one grouping of clergy. Some of these associations serve as a steering committee or board for the local food bank or other social need. Many clergy groups plan community worship for things such as Good Friday or a Martin Luther King celebration. Clergy groups, especially in urban areas, have monthly programs that serve to educate the clergy about the community in which they serve. All of these community associations serve the purpose of networking: helping clergy become acquainted with other clergy. However, because of the many time constraints clergy experience and because of the diverse theological views within such a group, it is not possible for community ministerial associations to be a source of empowerment for feminist clergy.

There may be connections made with individuals in these groups that may develop into relationships of choice and mutual support. This is one reason

involvement in such groups can be personally rewarding apart from an obvious reason that such involvement also brings one a sense of mission and purpose because one is making a difference in a community.

Another common grouping is in denominational districts or associations according to geographical proximity. Such groupings vary widely in the number of meetings, purpose and tasks from denomination to denomination and group to group. Gatherings of such groups are often unfortunately marked with the boasting of numbers, that is, how big one's church is, and griping about parishioners. There seems to be very little authentic interaction regarding deep-felt struggles of being a pastor of a local church. This may be because not everyone is capable of such authentic expression. Some may be fearful of sharing real feelings with persons who may one day be in positions of authority over one.

Clergy within denominations tend to be both professional and educational peers. Because of shared experience professionally and educationally, it is highly likely one will find in these groups individuals with which one can choose to be in a relationship of mutual support.

It is important for feminist clergy to maintain a presence in both community and denominational clergy groups. Because of the wide range of theological perspectives that are present in both groups, and because most clergy in both groups are blind to the patriarchal assumption of the church, the presence of feminist clergy is vital. It is vital for feminist clergy and it is vital for clergy who hold firmly the patriarchy of the church. If feminist clergy want to effect change, we must stay in

dialogue with our religious tradition. Cady writes in "Relational Love: A Feminist Christian Vision":

To develop effective alternatives to patriarchal visions of reality, feminist theology must maintain a critical relationship with the major religious traditions from which it springs. If it ceases to sustain a dialogue with its tradition, it risks becoming a marginal form of reflection, with negligible public impact. Alternatively, if it abandons its thoroughly critical perspective, it will fail to offer a genuine feminist alternative to patriarchy.⁵¹

There is often just as much theological diversity (and sometimes more in ecumenical gatherings) among clergy groups than in the local congregations. It is essential for feminist clergy to add the feminist perspective to this diversity with our presence and our questions regarding the patriarchal assumption of the church. Clergywomen groups provide no guarantee of mutual support either. Often the patriarchal assumption runs just as deeply among these groups as well.

Clergy are still acting out of a role as clergy when participating in clergy groups. We are there because we are clergy; it is part of our job. Beyond the limitations imposed by our roles, building relationships within these groups is complicated by the time constraints clergy face. Clergy groups cannot provide a community of relationships as the local church does because of time constraints and the limited purpose of these groups. But one may find individuals within such groups with whom relationships of mutual support and friendship can develop.

Peer relationships. As stated earlier, peer relationships occur among people with shared values and perspectives. For feminist clergy, peer relationships can occur

⁵¹ Cady, 136.

with both clergy and laity alike who share feminist values and perspectives. While feminist clergy may seek out other feminist clergy it is important to remember that there are lay people, unchurched individuals and individuals from other faith perspectives who are struggling with the same issues. Such individuals are seeking like-minded people with whom they can dialogue and learn more about feminist issues and how to address them in other relational contexts.

Generally speaking, participants in such relationships are comfortable with self-reflection and self-examination and have a well-differentiated sense of self. For this reason, it is within this relational context of peers that empowerment for feminist clergy can most readily occur.

This relational context can be and is for many feminist clergy our touchstone of reality. Our perspective of reality is so very different from those who are still blind to the patriarchal assumption and who outnumber us. It can become difficult at times to sense that we are perceiving even ourselves accurately in situations. We can be easily overwhelmed by the subtle and not so subtle ways of patriarchy. The reality of patriarchy is bombarding us constantly. Relationships with peers help us reframe reality when we feel lost in the reality of patriarchy. The relational context of peers provides for us mirrors to remember who we are as feminists.

If feminist clergy participate in peer relationships, we must be prepared to be mirrors for other feminists as well in a mutual exchange of support. We, too, must have a well-differentiated sense of self and continue the activity of self-reflection and self-examination in the relational context of peers. Such relationships are not to be

places of retreat only, where we can hide from the reality of our world; the relational context of peers is a re-creational context in which we do not have to expend the energy of protecting ourselves in order to participate in mutual exchange and support.

While feminist clergy are introducing more inclusive styles of worship into the local church scene, worship in churches is still burdened with the patriarchal assumption, so embedded is it in the subconscious of the church. The forum of women-church creates an environment in which the relational context of peers can be nurtured for feminists who desire to remain in the church. Women-church is a model proposed by Rosemary Radford Ruether and it is one way that women, coming out of a feminist perspective, are intentionally creating this space of mutual exchange and support. In such groups, women reframe reality through ritual as they support one another through life events. Ruether writes that one of the purposes of her book Women-Church is a "revisioning [of] church as a community of liberation from patriarchy."⁵²

She presents some new liturgy that demonstrates this liberation. My personal experience with women-church has been empowering through a life crisis. In Chapter 3, I related the event of my miscarriage. About one-and-a-half months later, my husband and I had a ritual in our home to put some closure on this event. We gathered together ten of our close friends, both male and female (one person is a member of the church where I am currently employed). Together we shared in the ritual of healing from a miscarriage from Ruether's Women-Church. The ritual

⁵² Ruether, Women-Church, 6.

proved to be a time of healing and an opening up of difficulties between my husband and myself that had been buried as a result of this crisis and others that fell on the heels of the miscarriage. Among our friends, it was safe not only to express my pain, but it was safe to express it out of my feminist perspective. For example, I did not have to fret over who might be offended by calling the divine God/ess. One friend even gave me a small statue of a fertility Goddess, something that would be unthinkable in the local church environment.

The activity of women-church has been limited to the participation of women for the most part and such support among women only is vital. However, it is important for women who are feminist to feel open to include men in the relational context of peer. Doing so provides the practice for what we vision for all of society. Carol Pierce and Bill Page name it collegueship in their book A Male/Female Continuum: Paths to Collegueship. They write:

Collegueship is a vision. . . . The central core of collegueship is equity, not equality. . . . When we refer to human interaction we speak of equity or fairness.

.
When we have learned to listen and ask questions, re-interpreted what helping means, value connecting more personally to others, without competition, acknowledge our power and other's, are increasingly direct and non-protective, deal with the quality of our introspective life, then we have built a base of support needed for collegueship.⁵³

There are both women and men who desire collegueship, who desire to relate

⁵³ Pierce and Page, 32.

to peers in mutuality. Some feminists believe that men cannot be feminists⁵⁴ but it is my contention that unless feminist women are willing to enter into the relational context of peer as a feminist with men who also seek to bring women's voice and experience into the mainstream, we are being exclusive - - which is what we are trying to change. We also cut off a viable and valuable source of empowerment.

⁵⁴ Mary Daly represents the position of feminists most vehemently opposed to men's participation in feminist circles. Harrison, in "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love," Making the Connections points out that Daly seeks what she calls a "segregated feminism" (p. 6.) See Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology: The Metaphysics of Radical Feminism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978) for her views on the necessity of this movement from patriarchal processions to the Journey Otherworld.

Chapter 5

Toward a Spirituality of Empowerment

The steps outlined in the following pages are suggestive of a spiritual process in which relational empowerment is a goal. By spiritual process I mean to include the physical, intellectual and relational; spiritual is used as an encompassing term.

Traditionally, Christianity has split off the spiritual into a category that is unrelated to the physical, intellectual and relational. It is my contention that our physicality, our intellect and the relationships we form with others are all windows by which we can better discern our spirit; they are also the foundations upon which our spirit can develop more fully.

These steps are informed by elements necessary for relational empowerment. Such a process assists in getting a handle on the theoretical portion of relational empowerment and provides a proactive possibility for developing relational empowerment. The steps are as follows: (1) Self-definition - - Embodiment and Intellect, (2) Building Relationships of Mutuality - - Listening Deeply, and (3) Speaking Out.

Self-Definition: Embodiment and Intellect

Self-definition is essential in the process of relational empowerment. Self-definition is the result of self-examination and self-reflection. As noted in Chapter 2, it is not narcissistic but is a way of developing a highly differentiated sense of self. A

highly differentiated sense of self is essential if we are to engage in relational empowerment. Relational empowerment assumes mutuality and mutuality requires empathy, and as stated in Chapter 3, empathy "always [comes] first at the expense of valuing one's experience."¹ Clearly we must begin with valuing our own experience if we are to engage in relational empowerment. Valuing our own experience begins with knowing who we are, i.e. defining our self.

It is important to remember that self-definition does not occur in a vacuum. We come to who we are and to know who we are in the context of relationships. From the moment we are born we are affected by those around us and have an affect on others. We must keep this in mind and try to discern how the activity of defining ourselves is affected by the way others have related to us and vice versa.

When we begin the activity of self-definition, we must begin with our physicality, or our embodiment, first. The split of mind and body in Christianity and Western philosophical thought has both underestimated and devalued the power of embodiment. We are physical beings and we must take into account this part of our self if we are to define ourselves holistically. It is through our senses that we take in our experiences. Our body is the means by which we know. Feminists are concerned with reclaiming the value of embodiment especially because women's *real* bodies are so devalued.

In Western tradition, the most familiar means of defining who we are had been through our intellect. Our intellect is a combination of what we know and what we

¹ Jordan, "Empathy and the Mother-Daughter Relationship," 3.

feel. we are accustomed to speaking out of who we are based upon what we know and what we feel. Feminist clergy are often not as accustomed or are afraid to speak out of who we are based upon what we know and how we feel as feminists. This is because the patriarchal assumption runs deeply in our definitions of self and world. As feminist clergy we must be particularly intentional in this activity of knowing our intellect so we can challenge the patriarchal assumption.

Embodiment

Carter Heyward, in Touching Our Strength, has endeavored

to give voice to and embodied - sensual - relational movement among women and men who experience our sensualities as a liberating resource and who, at least in part through this experience, have been strengthened in the struggle for justice for all.²

Heyward develops the notion of the erotic as power in right relation in an attempt to reconstruct a more positive understanding and reflection of sensuality and sexuality.³ She recognizes that the devaluing of the physical, which is often couched in sensual/sexual terms in Christianity, is destructive to relationship.

The body has been identified, in the dualism of Christianity and Western philosophical thought, with the feminine. It is passive, receptive, and in need of being controlled. The intellect and male part of the person is supposed to do the controlling. Susan Griffin explains in Pornography and Silence why in Western thought and in Christianity the feminine needs controlling by the masculine.

² Carter Heyward, Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 3.

³ Ibid.

A man who penetrates this darkness [of the female's hidden knowledge of her body] goes into danger. He risks his life. The female voice . . . calls him back to hell or to death. She must be silence. And she must be mastered, for the dark forces which she ignorantly holds within her body are as perilous as the force of nature.⁴

Women are automatically devalued in this dualism because we completely embody the feminine. This split of body and mind, so popular in the history of much of Western philosophical and religious thought, places the body in a subordinate position to the mind or the intellect. Woman is also absent from the sacred. Griffin specifically addresses this from the Christian perspective pointing out that "For the proposition that woman, who is nature, could be sacred is not a possible concept in a culture which is by definition above nature."⁵ Therefore, female is subordinate to male in both secular and sacred thought.

The Western culture and the culture of the Christian religion is set over and against woman. Griffin explains:

this mind, which is so terrified of woman and nature, and of the force of eros, must separate itself from what it fears. Now it will call itself culture and oppose itself to woman and nature. For now culture shall become an instrument of revenge against the power of nature embodied in the image of a woman. And so now, within this mind which has become culture, woman will either be excluded, and her presence made an absence, a kind of death of the mind, or she shall be humiliated, so that the images we come to know of woman will be degraded images.⁶

Because nature is equated with the feminine and technology is equated with the

⁴ Susan Griffin, Pornography and Silence (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 13. Griffin also notes that "Eros and nature . . . are made into one force, and this force is personified as a woman. But this is simultaneously a fatal and an evil force."

⁵ Ibid., 71.

⁶ Ibid., 13-14.

Because nature is equated with the feminine and technology is equated with the masculine, nature is subordinate as well. Such a split and devaluation of embodiment has proved to be destructive in the violence done to women by both strangers and family members, usually male, and by the technological violence perpetrated on the earth which is commonly referred to as Mother Earth.

Sensuality has often been seen as sinful in the confines of Christianity.⁷ The appreciation of our senses, particularly of touch, has been put aside in favor of an ideology that claims our body puts us at the risk of all sorts of temptations. In the letter to the Romans is one clear example of this:

For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law - indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. . . . But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. . . . for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.⁸

The body is clearly a liability in this passage of scripture as well as in many other passages. The spirit, and one could even say, the intellect, is the only saving grace we possess as humans.

Paul instructed the believers at the church in Corinth that the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. What Paul most likely meant, based upon some of his other

⁷ Margaret R. Miles, in Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West (New York: Vintage Books, 1989) discusses some of the attempts of the church throughout its history to place controls on the bodies of the laity, particularly the bodies of women.

⁸ Rom. 8:7-10; 13, NRSV.

writings, was that believers must be careful not to defile the temple of the Holy Spirit. Their body is objectified by understanding it as a vessel for the containment of the Holy Spirit. While it might be argued that Paul was claiming the possibilities of the goodness of the body, the reality is that Paul objectified the body in much of his writings. On several occasions he did put it on par with the Spirit as regards the defilement that both body and Spirit could experience. However, the sensuality of being in one's body clearly was troublesome for the Christians in the Pauline communities.

The flesh was named as the instrument by which evil could occur, a thing not to be enjoyed. Believers were encouraged to "put off the body of the flesh."⁹ This split of body and spirit, or body and intellect, encourages the viewing the feminine as object. It also demands that individuals maintain this split within their own self. Such a split only serves to further our self-alienation, making it more difficult to connect not only with ourselves, but with others.

Women in particular have difficulty appreciating our bodies. Current western culture seems to demand a body type, projected by the media, that less than 5% ^{percent} of the female population actually possess. Even men are beginning to fall under the spell of the ideal body image projected on our television screen and in magazines. Women, however, are still by and large more vulnerable to the devaluing of our body. This is because our embodiment of the feminine has been so long devalued in the ideology of the patriarchal assumption. This can be clearly seen today in the preponderance of

⁹ Col. 2:11, NRSV.

feminine hygiene products and the advertising campaigns used to sell these products. The not so subtle message is that women are unclean and that the normal functions of our body are a nuisance, viewed as symptoms of an illness that must be treated, e.g. bloating, smell, cramps. The only product specifically made with regard to male sexuality, besides a jock-strap, is the condom. These are not advertised with nearly the bravado that feminine products are, in spite of the fact that they can help to prevent HIV infection, often viewed of as a disease of the unclean.

The devaluation of human embodiment within the constructs of Christianity is at odds with Christianity's incarnational notion of the divine. Incarnational theology could be seen as Christianity's self-critique. According to Christian tradition, God is embodied, made incarnate, in Jesus. It would follow then that God values embodiment.

The body is essential to our spirituality. Spirituality in both the West and the East place importance on the theme of awakening: awakening to ourselves and to injustice experienced by others. Maria Harris, in Dance of the Spirit, writes, "The Awakening of spirituality starts with [a] special from of *sensual* attentiveness."¹⁰ We experience our spirituality first and foremost through our sensuality. "Awakening begins with our senses and our bodiliness. Therefore, there is only one place to start: the body."¹¹

¹⁰ Maria Harris, Dance of the Spirit (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1989), 4.

¹¹ Ibid.

The body and its activity must be incorporated into our self understanding if we are to be whole persons. We must appreciate it, maintain it and nurture it in order to gain a sense of our own embodiment. Theology and philosophy must also take into account the body and its activity; doing so is a means of being grounded in actuality. Our body is a means of our being connected beyond the limitations of our physicality, as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin recognizes when he writes:

The Body is the very universality of things. . . . My matter is not a part of the universe that I possess totally. It is the totality of the universe that I possess partially.¹²

Within our body is contained the totality of the universe. We do not possess the entire universe, but its completeness is our body. In caring for our bodies we are, in a sense, caring for the universe.

Many clergy are so other directed that taking the time and energy to care for our bodies is not high on the list of priorities. Yet when we realize, as Teilhard de Chardin has written, that our body "is the totality of the universe" which we partially possess, it gives us pause to appreciate our connectedness with the universe and our responsibility for caring for the small portion we do possess. Taking the time to be connected to our body through exercise and general care - - sufficient sleep, healthful eating - - is something many clergy will not do or are encouraged to do because of the perception of our job as a lifestyle: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, with a minimum work week of 60 hours. General maintenance of our body is only one part of embodiment in which we must engage. The other part is appreciation and even love

¹² Quoted in Heyward, Touching Our Strength, 25.

If we appreciate our body we will take better care of it and also trust its input into who we are. As stated earlier, the body and its activity have been devalued in Christianity and Western philosophical thought. Yet it is through our body that we relate to the world, thereby developing who we are. When we claim our body as part of who we are, we are claiming the authority of our experience for it is our body that makes it possible for us to experience; our sensuality is essential for our authority.

Heyward puts it this way:

If we learn to trust our senses, our capacities to touch, taste, smell, hear, see, and thereby know, they can teach us what is good and what is bad, what is real and what is false, for us in relation to one another and to the earth and cosmos. . . . sensuality is a foundation for our authority.¹³

It was stated in Chapter 4 that authority is the confidence to be who we are and to act out who we are. Our physical reality is a big part of who we are. When we claim the authority of our own experience we must include the experience of being embodied - - the experience of being a sensual being. We are empowered in the activity of experiencing our sensuality and in the claiming of the authority of our embodied experience.

Feminist clergy must learn ways of being and feeling embodied, in our bodies. As pointed out earlier, much of our Western ideology pushes us in the direction of being split from our bodies. However, being and feeling embodied is being and feeling powerful. For example, one of the ways I feel in my body the most, feel most connected with my body is during and after a week of backpacking in the high

¹³ Heyward, Touching Our Strength, 93.

most connected with my body is during and after a week of backpacking in the high country of the Eastern Sierras in California. In many ways, my body is placed under stress - carrying 30 pounds, climbing 11,000 foot passes. Yet in placing demands upon my body that are at the same time healthful to my body causes me to feel more connected to my body. I genuinely feel more in my body and am always astounded at how centered and powerful I feel as a result. In addition, the experience of the wilderness area causes me to sense my physical connectedness with the physical beauty I observe. I am glad to claim my embodiment.

There are many ways to be and feel embodied. For some it may be playing racquetball, for others it might be making love with their partner, and still others a time of meditation focused on one's body. Being and feeling embodied means to be consciously aware of one's place in one's own body and valuing that experience. Feminist clergy must regularly engage in activity that brings us to places of being and feeling embodied in order to define ourselves. It is then that we can claim the authority of our existential experience.

Intellect

What we know and what we feel are activities generally ascribed to the area of the intellect. I include feeling, or intuition, because it is a form of intelligence,¹⁴ albeit a devalued form. Intuition is a way of knowing without having to consciously be aware of external facts. It is an internal knowing that can precede activity. Intuition is discussed more at a later point.

¹⁴ See Heyward, Touching Our Strength, 94.

unknown information about the status of women throughout history. This knowing or knowledge becomes part of our intellect and therefore informs how we define ourselves. Feminist clergy must continue acquiring information about the status of women, both past and present. We must stay informed through the reading of feminist literature in a variety of fields that is engaging the prevailing patriarch culture in dialogue. This self-education must lead to our own creation of dialogue with others. It is in the dialogue with others, both those of similar and differing perspective that we can clearly define who we are.

The feeling or intuitive part of our intellect is understood to be feminine and has been devalued by a culture that places a high value on empirical evidence, which is understood to be a male experience. However, our intuition can be our most significant way of knowing. Intuition often precedes empirical knowledge and therefore can lead us in directions of investigation. Addressing the issue of conflict, Miller writes, "When women *feel* in conflict, there is a good reason to believe they should *be* in conflict."¹⁵ Other words could be inserted for conflict; the point is that our feelings are often strong indicators of what is happening around us.

Intuition is often informed by the evocative, for example, body language, tone of voice, or even a look in a person's eye. These activities give clues to who people are and from these activities it is possible to intuit much. Observations of the evocative are often subconscious so those who have hunches do not often know how or why they feel a particular way about something or someone.

¹⁵ Jean Baker Miller, Toward a New Psychology of Women, 131.

or why they feel a particular way about something or someone.

Paying attention to the evocative is one way to develop our intuition. Feminist clergy, women and men, must value intuition or feeling. We must accept it as a viable part of our intellect and therefore part of who we are.

Building Relationships of Mutuality:

Listening Deeply

Once we have engaged in the ongoing process of defining who we are and have taken responsibility for that process, we can begin the next step toward empowerment. Having taken responsibility for our own agenda, we do not need others to set our agenda for us; now we are in a position to build relationships of mutuality. We have listened deeply to our own experience and are in a place to listen deeply to the experience of others.

When we listen deeply to others we are making it possible for us to experience the other as intrinsically valuable.¹⁶ In doing so, we move toward a situation of justice. Heyward writes, "To experience ourselves genuinely as friends: This is justice."¹⁷ While our activity of deep listening may not always be reciprocated in an act of friendship, it is toward this goal that we must move if we are to build relationships of mutuality. Not all of our attempts will succeed. But there will be persons who are awakened, enlivened to be more authentically themselves with us because we have been authentic with them.

¹⁶ Heyward, Touching Our Strength, 23.

¹⁷ Ibid.

beyond. The reasons for this have been stated in Chapter 4; however, a note about friendships in the local church is worth adding. Due to the amount of time, social and working time, clergy spend with the people of the congregation with whom we serve, we must develop some relationships of mutuality if we are to survive. This is particularly true for feminist clergy. Our views are foreign enough so that we will be treated as complete outsiders if we have not developed relationships within the local church that provide mutual support. We must be careful, however, that these relationships do not become ways of not dealing with parishioners with whom connections seem few and non-existent.

In order to create the time to listen deeply to those in our midst, we must be willing to act out of our high differentiated sense of self before or even instead of out of our role as pastor. For example, at church functions, it is much easier to put on our pastor hat and work the room. Yet, how much more effective our ministry would be if, instead of working a room, i.e. seeing everybody we could see, we spent the time being a part of groups of conversation. Too often, the pastor works a room so that everyone gets to talk to her/him. The problem is that no one really gets to be engaged as a person. The pastor talks to parishioners; everyone is playing a role.

I am struck by how many people approach me with heavy hearts; they need someone to listen to because the senior pastor is busy seeing everybody. This is not to condemn the senior pastor; many people expect him to make the rounds because they think that is what a pastor is supposed to do and he garners important information about people's lives. This, too, is perhaps an advantage of a multiple staff; there is

always one person available for those needing more than the normal checking in. In addition, the pastor who is available in this way is not always the same person. This role of counselor can be flexible.

It is advisable for the pastor to participate in conversation, to get beyond the formal niceties. Getting beyond the "How are you," takes more than a few minutes. Feminist clergy serving as local pastors must give up the need to see everybody and replace it with the activity of engaging some of the people all of the time. It is like a periodic gathering of friends. Time and circumstances do not allow for us to connect with everyone when we gather with a group of friends. Over time, however, we do make connections with everyone in our circle of friendship. In this way we build relationships that can withstand some distance of time and space.

Another way feminist clergy can engage in building relationships of mutuality is through spending time with parishioners that is in any official capacity. It is in spending time around dinner tables, recreational activities, or even work projects (Habitat for Humanity, quilt making) that we can come to know people's lives beyond the walls of the church. As suggested in Chapter 4, feminist clergy must befriend the people in the churches where they work if we are going to have the hope of being befriended.

When we treat parishioners as people first, endeavoring to create relationships of mutuality, we empower our own sense of authenticity as well as their sense of authenticity. And relationships, Miller writes, "can lead to more, rather than less,

authenticity."¹⁸ In relating out of our sense of self first, we are being authentic. Feminist clergy approach relationships with parishioners out of our sense of self first and out of our role as clergy only when the situation requires it as in times of crises. This activity of deep listening and finding connections can empower pastor and parishioner into relationship, transforming the relationships within the local church. As Miller points out, "to derive strength from relationships, then, clearly requires a transformation and restructuring of the nature of relationships."¹⁹

Speaking Out

Once we have developed relationships of mutuality in and beyond the local church, we have created an environment in which it is easier to speak out - - to openly identify ourselves as feminist clergy. We must be careful, however, that our desire for an environment that is more receptive to us as individuals does not keep us from speaking out. Heyward reminds us:

Our silence will not protect us. Our best protection is to speak the truth of our lives insofar as we can. . . . Either we speak as best we can or our power in relation will slip away like a thief in the night.²⁰

We can wait too long for the right opportunity to speak out and appear unauthentic when we do because no one had a clue we felt that way before.

Four years passed from the time I began as an associate pastor after my ordination until the time I was open about claiming my experience as a feminist.

¹⁸ Jean Baker Miller, Toward a New Psychology of Women, 109.

¹⁹ Ibid., 96.

²⁰ Heyward, Touching Our Strength, 47.

While this period of waiting was not intentional, it was helpful because I had developed many relationships, some of mutuality during that time. Many parishioners know me as a person, both my strengths and my weaknesses. In claiming my feminism openly and clearly, I found that there were others in the congregation, of whom I had been unaware, who shared my values. I also found that in claiming my experience as a feminist, I felt more sure of myself, more empowered.

It was no mystery to many people in the church that I am sympathetic to women's issues. I have used female imagery for the divine, spoken of God as a mother in several sermons and raised gender-related issues when the opportunity arises. Though, until I was open with my community of faith about who I am, I did not affirm for myself how deeply I valued feminist values.

There are those who are uncomfortable, even fearful with my claim of feminism; this is the primary reason I had kept silent. But there was/is power in claiming my identity in spite of my own fear of rejection. There will be those who want to deny feminist clergy claims of identity and authenticity when we speak out as feminist clergy. We are and will continue to be unwelcome. It is similar to what Heyward describes regarding lesbian women and gay men who are coming out:

Whenever we speak the truth of our lives in situations in which our truths are unwelcome, we are like intense light, difficult for others to bear. The primary danger to us is that the intensity of our own light may bounce back upon us and blind us. In coming out, we do not know anymore than others about how to live the implications of our lives as openly lesbian women or gay men.²¹

²¹ Ibid., 30.

While Heyward is specifically addressing concerns of openly lesbian women and gay men, her words apply to openly feminist people as she is concerned with issues of gender as well. She recognizes the connectedness of experience between those who have experienced oppression. Rhodes scholar, Susan Biemesderfer articulated the connection when she wrote, "Misogyny and homophobia . . . are kindred hatreds."²² In spite of the conflict we will face, or perhaps because of it, feminist clergy must be able to speak out if the sins of patriarchy are to every be cogently challenged.

Conclusion

Greenleaf wrote, "The search for wholeness is something they, the leader and the led, share."²³ In the shared search, difficulties arise when the visions of wholeness appear completely dissonant. Feminist clergy know that dissonance is part of the vista when we speak and act authentically out of who we are. It can lead feminist clergy to feel beat up and disregarded by a church steeped in patriarchal values. For those of us who choose to remain, it seems as though we have masochistic tendencies. However, it is more likely that it is our own wholeness we seek.

Greenleaf discusses the motivation of people to lead, and reports one commonality: people who lead do so for their own healing.²⁴ In working to bring

²² Susan C. Biemesderfer, "Discrimination Against Me Will Soon Be Legal In Colorado," Los Angeles Times, 27 Dec. 1992: M3.

²³ Greenleaf, 36.

²⁴ Ibid.

wholeness and healing to the church, feminist clergy are seeking - - and sometimes finding - - our own wholeness and healing.

Appendix A

"Bring Many Names"

Bring many names, beautiful and good,
Celebrate in parable and story.
Holiness and glory, living, loving God,
Hail and hosanna, bring many names.

Strong Mother God, working night and day
Planning all the wonders of creation.
Setting each equation, genius at play,
Hail and hosanna, strong Mother God

Warm Father God, hugging every child,
Feeling all the strains of human living.
Caring and forgiving, till we're reconciled,
Hail and hosanna, strong Father God.

Old aching God, grey with endless care,
calmly piercing evil's new disguises.
Glad of good surprises, wiser than despair,
Hail and hosanna, old aching God.

Young growing God, eager on the move,
Seeing all and fretting at our blindness.
Crying out for justice, giving all you have,
Hail and hosanna, young growing God.

Great living God, never fully known,
Joyful darknes, far beyond our seeing.
Closer yet than breathing, everlasting home,
Hail and hosanna, great living God.

Brian Wren, "Bring Many Names," in Bring Many Names (Carol Stream, Ill.: Hope Publishing, 1989), No. 9. Reprinted by special permission.

Appendix B

"I Raised A Son"

Sermon - Good Friday, April 17, 1992

by

Julie Roberts-Fronk

I raised a son who was born too soon. His birth was filled with fear and joy. But once I held him to my breast, the world outside our little circle seemed to disappear. He would sleep in my arms and I would hold him just to look at him. The look of his sweet smile and the sound of his sweet voice softened my heart even more, lifting my spirit when I was weary and making my heart smile.

I raised a son who liked to be at his parents' side, helping daddy measure and cut wood from the time he could walk. Helping me mix the dough for our bread and carrying the jug to the well.

I raised a son who cared deeply about his friends, defending the children who were always teased and bullied to the point of getting hurt once in awhile himself.

I raised a son who became disillusioned with the hypocrisy of his elders and actually believed he could help bring change and new life to a faith which meant so much to him. He became a teacher, a healer and a lover of people. I was proud of him: proud of his confidence and his kindness.

I raised a son who would not conform, who stepped over boundaries on

people's toes who could hurt him and who did.

Many say he sacrificed his life for you, so you might live - - forever. Many say he sacrificed his life to stand in solidarity with those who are crucified daily on your streets, in your prisons and in your ghettos. But what of my sacrifice? What have I gained?

My loss is your triumph and that is supposed to make me feel better? Can you promise me that you will no longer crucify the sons and daughters of a million mothers? If my child's death really had ended the intentional pain you inflict upon each other, I might have found solace, I might have found some comfort. So don't tell me not to weep or mourn for the suffering of my child. Don't tell me it had to be this way. How selfish!

I raised a son. I raised a son to die for you?

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